



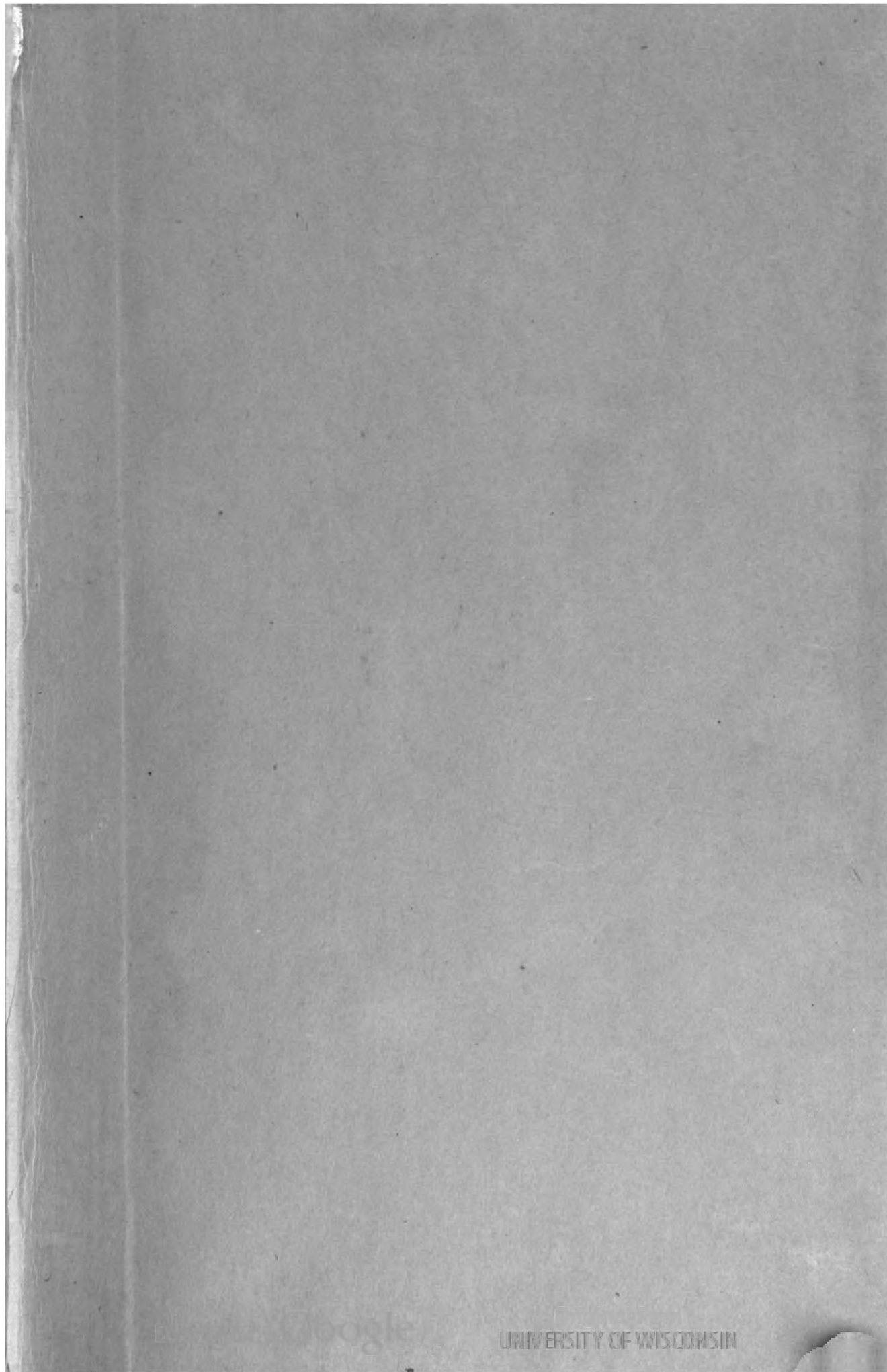
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# THEY NEVER HAD IT SO GOOD







# THEY NEVER HAD IT SO GOOD

THE PERSONAL, UNOFFICIAL STORY OF THE 350TH BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON (H)

100TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H) USAAF

1942 — 1945

BY

JACK W. SHERIDAN

LIMITED EDITION

4274

I wish to express on behalf of myself and the former members of the 350th Squadron the deepest appreciation and gratitude to Mr. Leslie Whitwell of San Francisco who has unselfishly given much time and keen interest to the production of this book. Without his invaluable help and understanding, this work could not have been possible.

JACK W. SHERIDAN

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## FOREWORD

This is the story of the 350th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) who, in company with the 349th, 351st, and 418th Bombardment Squadrons, comprised the 100th Bombardment Group (Heavy), United States Army Air Force, and who, in its time, did some of the work that brought Germany to her knees.

I was tempted at first to say that the story that follows is simply a story of a squadron, a story that must have been mirrored in the lives of thousands of persons in the Air Force all over the world. And yet, looking back over the years between, I know that is not quite right. Because the 350th had something different.

It wasn't esprit de corps, because most units have that loyalty and pride and affection for their work and their accomplishments. It was something one can't exactly explain. A greater, more powerful love and pride in each other as men and because of it a fiercer, more deeply-rooted pride in their accomplishments and achievements. It was the affection they felt for each other that was greater than their achievements.

The story that is told here is my own attempt to tell of that life we had together. The achievements are all there; the missions, the heroisms, the honors. But they are only a part of the story. Because the real thing wasn't in the sky at all. It was in the Mess Halls, in the barracks, along the lanes, out on the fields of England. It was the things that happened on the ground that made the sky a natural path to triumph.

It is for all the men, the skymen and the ground men, that this book is written and it is to them that it is dedicated.

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PART 1  
MAY 1942 TO MAY 1943

I

Along about May, 1942, while I was sitting at home waiting for the draft board to come along and claim its due, there were, scattered over the face of the United States, a number of people wearing the uniform of whom I had never heard; in whom I should not have been interested, should I have heard of them.

There was a young, twenty-three year old Lieutenant named Cleven, for example, stationed somewhere in the interior of California whose duty it was at that time to take other youngsters out on the dusty training fields to try and drill through their heads the rudiments of flying. In those days, just six months after Pearl Harbor, the rudiments were pushed in mighty fast and the job was an irksome one. Particularly, if, like the Lieutenant, you wanted to fly and not teach. He'd been flying for a couple of years himself. He had the makings for combat. A little on the dare-devil side, he took life pretty much as he found it. No drinking. No smoking. No chasing. Just flying. And he wanted action.

Over on the other side of the country, down in Florida, away down south near Tampa, at a place called MacDill Field, a few enlisted men and a couple of officers pulled guard duty and worked on planes and wondered when in the devil they were going to get something real to do.

Down in Luke Field, Arizona, a youngster wearing sergeant's stripes (he'd been enlisted early) sweated out his application for Officers Candidate School. He got it finally and went off to Florida and Miami and was tossed into the training course that was a lot of damned hard work and seemed like it would never come to an end. But finally it did come to an end. Sergeant Horace L. Varian found his insignia on his collar instead of his sleeve and the officers called him Lieutenant and the men called him "sir". He'd made some friends at school too. People like Robert Tienken from California, and some others.

There were thousands of men drawn into service in that year of 1942. Through the spring and summer it continued unabated. A rising tide of men marched into the reception centers all over the country. The whole country was getting into the fight. Including me, for I was drafted on the 20th of May.

The things that happened to me in the first days of my Army life happened to pretty nearly everybody. I spent about four days in the horrors of the reception center, during which time the most important thing that happened to me was that I learned how to live and move and have my being with about a hundred other guys.

After that it was six weeks of basic training at Sheppard Field, Texas. Hours upon hours of drilling, calisthenics, the hand salute by the numbers and all the rest of it on the blistering pan of the drill field under a July sun in Texas. I learned to hate the drill instructors, all the officers and some of my bunkmates. I learned to like a great many more of them.

I graduated from Sheppard during the first week in October 1942. In the meantime the men I didn't know . . . Lieutenant Cleven, Lieutenant Varian, Lieutenant Tienken, and the enlisted men who were putting into practice the theory I had been learning, had done some things on their own. Cleven, for example, had gone from California to MacDill Field, where the enlisted men were, and had joined up with the 6th Squadron. He was sweating the hope of combat out along with them. Varian, in the meantime, had taken his bars and his friend Tienken and they had been assigned to Gowen Field, up at Boise, Idaho, where Varian, inclined to be a little pudgy anyhow, got himself fixed up with a nice soft job in the Mess Hall.

Then, as the fall came on in 1942, the 29th Bombardment Group left MacDill Field to cross the country to the wooded country of Idaho and they settled down at



Boise, too. That's how things came about in 1942. From one end of the country to the other the war brought about that fine knitting process that only a war can . . . people from one end of the country find themselves sleeping next to people from the other end of the country. And all that really held them together was a name like 29th Bombardment Group or whatever name belonged to them.

Life in Boise that fall was a curious mixture of good and bad. The town of Boise was well-liked by servicemen: lots of girls and lots of fun and from the stories that flourished forever more, the boys at Gowen Field had a rich combination of both during the fall days.

In the meantime, armed with one diploma telling how good a mechanic I was, I was forwarded to the Lockheed Vega school at Burbank, California, where for another month I was exposed to the finer points about the B-17. Finally, I was a specialist in the B-17. At least, that was the Army's story. The time was just before Thanksgiving, 1942. I had been trained. I was ready to put on the mantle of the mechanic. The line waited for me. The train hauled my carcass to Salt Lake City.

The records of Private Sheridan said in unmistakable words that I was an accredited mechanic. There was no out. The Army had done it; and yet, I was the sole responsible one. The shape of things to come in my life in November 1942 was sickening, awful, too terrible to contemplate. I knew only one thing on the train to Salt Lake City, to the base from which I would be assigned to a permanent unit. That was, desperately, I had to get out before it was too late. Even cleaning latrines for the rest of the war would be better!

As October came to Boise, Idaho, word began to seep into the barracks, into the Officers' Club. Boise was a base at which new Groups were formed and sent on their training ways. It was a mother base from which the units to fight the war were born and sent out. And, as October began, word began to drift aimlessly through the field that a new Group was to be formed. Rumored quietly at first, and then with growing power. A new Group was to be formed from the present outfit, a process like that of an amoeba, breaking off into little images of itself, until at length there would be a new Group with new Squadrons. The men of the field began to sweat out the spots they wanted in this new picture. The rumors began to roll heavier each day. Like the rumble of a coming convoy that you hear before you can actually see the trucks. Somehow, in the Army, when these rumors start, they generally happen to be true. This rumor was no exception.

On the morning of October 27, 1942, there was issued from Headquarters, Air Base, Gowen Field, Idaho, an order: Special Orders, Number 300, which in effect did activate officially a new Bomb Group and its auxiliary squadrons. To the 100th Bombardment Group (H) Headquarters detachment were assigned sixteen men who would comprise the initial cadre or nucleus. Among them were the adjutant, Captain Karl Standish, and several other officers, including Lieutenant Malcolm W. Clouter, a communications officer. The bulk of the personnel was enlisted. To form the squadron cadres larger groups of men were assigned. Some twenty-six enlisted men to a unit, plus six or seven officers. And comprising the Group were four squadrons . . . the 418th, the 351st, the 349th, and the 350th.

Named as Squadron Commander of the 350th was that same Cleven, Gale W. Cleven, the Lieutenant who wanted combat and who had since become a Captain teaching the youngsters how to fly. His adjutant was named as Lieutenant Horace L. Varian, Jr., that same sergeant who had made OCS and since run the Mess Hall at Boise. The other officers named to the Squadron were all Second Lieutenants, fresh, green, and terribly responsible. Lieutenant Alfred Iannacone, communications; Timothy R. McMahon, armament; Donald J. Blazer, engineering; and Robert Tienken, supply. These were the originals.

Among the enlisted personnel, a Staff Sergeant Karl W. Kirn was named as First Sergeant. He had been in the old unit at MacDill Field and at Gowen Field

had acted as a duty sergeant. He had appeared flanking Captain Standish on inspections. He was the one who took down the names. He was not the most popular of men. But he was a good sergeant. Then there was Sergeant Louis A. Hays who had a lot of time in the Army and was named a section head for armament. Sergeant Lawrence Bowe who was put into the bombsight department, Staff Sergeant Richard Hawkins whose training marked him for the turret department. They'd all been down in Florida. They all had some time in the Army. But topping the list was Master Sergeant Harry H. McMillion who became the Squadron's line chief, the non-commissioned officer in charge of the maintenance of the squadron's aircraft. He was a top notch choice and one of the best of the line chiefs in the business at that time. He had a long period of training and he was an autocrat of the first water. He was dominant, headstrong, wilful, and in time to come was to be almost universally feared and disliked. But he had the experience and he knew his job and it was his drive and force that was so necessary in the beginning. Technical Sergeant William H. Jackson headed up the communications crowd and he brought to his department the same experience and knowledge as the others brought to theirs. These were but a few of the original twenty-six. All of them were good men, picked men. And all of them ached for a chance to prove it.

As in story books and in the movies, it was a collection of bakers and butchers, clerks and mechanics, salesmen and farmers, schoolboys and vagrants, all banding together to do a work strange and ill-fitting. The officers at their head were painfully, awkwardly new. The men were new. The job was new. Everyone was bewildered and unsure. Everyone was stepping on everyone else's feet. But on paper they were the beginnings of the 350th and the seeds of their loyalty had been sown on fertile ground. So they got ready to grab their pencils and paper, their tubes and their trucks, their wrenches and their charts and dug in. That night the new company clerk, Sergeant Kenneth R. Peterson hauled out his typewriter—one on which the "R" key always stuck—and he wrote on a clean page of the Morning Report—

"October

27 350th B Sq (H) activated as part of 100th B Gp (H)"

The 350th was on its way!

## II

And so while I was on intimate terms with the B-17 in Burbank, California, these things were coming about in Boise, Idaho. Thus the new 100th Bombardment Group (H) was born and came into being. Thus the 350th Bombardment Squadron. On the morning of October 29th, 1942, two days after they had been activated, the Group left Gowen Field by rail for their first training station. There is an entry in the 350th Squadron's Morning Report that covers it well:

*"Left Gowen Field, Idaho, by troop-train at 0945. Arrived AAB, Walla, Walla, Wash., 2350. Morale Excellent."*

In those days of training a Group underwent about three phases. In the first phase, immediately following the activation of the unit, they went off, comprised only of their ground echelon, the maintenance and administrative personnel. There were no air crews assigned to them as yet and their initial training was to learn to administrate themselves and to learn how to co-ordinate their efforts so that when the air crews were assigned to them they would be ready for them and know what to do. True, there were a few planes. The Squadron Commanders were flyers, as well as the Group Commander and such personnel as the Operations officers and the like. But all in all, it was a ground unit in the beginning phase. The plan called for a set-up like this. First month: stationed at a field for preliminary and administrative training as above. Second month: assignment of air crews and coordination between air and ground crews with accent on practice bombing and accurate maintenance of aircraft. Third month: further all-around training and preparation for combat. After that—overseas and the job. Each month was to be spent at a different air base in some part

of the western states. That is about what any of them knew was in store for them at that time.

And so they came to Walla Walla for the first month's training. The first phase on the road to a war that seemed awfully far away and unreal. They first met Darr Alkire, Colonel, AC, who arrived at Walla Walla a few days after the Group. Alkire was vitriolic of speech and quick-witted, stinging on occasion like a smarting lash. He soon made his future course known to the Group beneath his command. His methods were sure and swift, his purpose solid and unwavering, and his ultimate destination, as he bluntly told the wide-eyed group in their first meeting, was "murder". Literally. He hated the Axis and before the meeting came to an end, Alkire's men knew and felt that the 100th Group and its squadrons were "in business for blood!" The Colonel's tongue stirred the eager blood of the men who heard him and his purpose began to fire and to glow as a common goal within the group. The war wasn't quite as far away as it had been.

The inspecting Captain Standish was under Alkire as his adjutant. A veteran of the first world war, he was an older man, a ground man, and a somewhat grouchy man upon numerous occasions. As Group Adjutant he held his place. He was opinionated and he held to his opinions. They were sometimes firm, sometimes harsh. But they were his opinions and the squadron adjutants beneath him soon learned that he was the law. They grumbled and complained and disliked as they went, but they were learning. A good soldier, Standish was an even better paper man and under his control the youngsters beneath him learned and learned quickly.

And so the month of November in Walla Walla began to pass. New men came from the replacement depots at Salt Lake City almost daily. Private J. C. Hale was assigned and placed in the Operations office of the squadron. Others came and found their places. Hale had been an aviation mechanic—but he soon became a clerk in Operations. Others came as armorers or mechanics and wound up as clerks or firemen, or whatever need was pressing at the moment. It wasn't strictly according to the letter of the Army. These men had been training in armorer work or had spent five months as mechanics but, even though it was not according to Hoyle, if they were needed somewhere else, in they went. That was the secret of the Squadron's success, or the beginning of it. A man must be happy in his work to produce the best effort and therefore the best result for the good of the whole organization. And so the Squadron was constantly on the outlook for material that would fill jobs in which they were interested and needed. Hence the offices and the line became working parts of a unit, working in ease and spontaneity because the personnel was well-suited to their tasks and therefore happy in this new life of theirs.

Sergeant Kirn began his rule as First Sergeant with the iron hand and the explosive nature, the calm placid streaks and the sarcastically bitter waves, that the personnel came to know. His methods were sometimes severe; many times over-lenient. But generally fair. He tried desperately to maintain an equality with all the men. Though I personally don't think it ever reached any sort of equality at all. He did put all his clerks on KP and all the other details. And if so much as a minor complaint were voiced there was always Kirn's snarl—

"You're no better than the rest, are you?"

There might have been an answer to that. I thought of several. But none of us ever brought it up.

Sergeant Peterson, roly-poly "Pete" took his place as Sergeant Major, and Private Harold Garic moved into the personnel section with Private James H. Tipton as an assistant. Garic was particularly valuable at this time since he had been a payroll clerk with the New Orleans Times-Picayune and no one had thought to assign a payroll clerk to the unit. Garic was trained as an airplane mechanic. I don't recall him ever lifting a wrench. But everyone got paid.

Private Melvin B. Cooperman became the Engineering clerk and Private Henry



Fox sat in the Technical Supply office. Private Warren Nelson took over S-2 (Intelligence) while a trained armorer, Private Joseph M. Vassar, wound up assistant clerk in Operations. And the organization began to grow and spread and become just that, an organization.

In the administration, Lieutenant Varian fought his way through the maze of confusion and paper attached to the adjutant's job, deviled by Standish from above and aided and abetted by his immediate superior, Captain Cleven. Varian began to grow with the job and his friendship with Cleven became firm and fast. The Captain called him "Little Chum" (and still does) and with "Little Chum" helping him, the Captain breezed along, administering a little (and generally in a most unorthodox manner), flying as much as he could. His ready humor and even manner won him a host of friends among the men. And they felt this friendship and respected it. His talent and skill as a flyer began to be key-note around the Squadron. In fact, one afternoon at Walla Walla was the CO's introduction to admiration among his men.

Captain Cleven had one of the Flying Forts off the ground one afternoon and the weather very suddenly turned to a pea-soup fog. One of those clinging fogs that held to the ground with a terrible and final density. And when the fog was the thickest and most impenetrable—that was the moment Cleven chose to come in. Word flew around the squadron and the entire personnel headed for the ramp. From the unknown overhead came the steady drone of the Fortress' engines. Through the tower radio they advised him not to attempt the landing. Not to attempt coming in blind like that.

"I'm coming down." Cleven laughed slightly over his radio. "I gotta date."

Finally down through the veil came the black shadow of the slowly settling plane. The men ranged on the edge of the ramp, held their breaths, and crossed their fingers, straining to see through. But it was impossible. Down he came. Down some more. They couldn't see much but they could trace his progress by the sound of the engine. Down and suddenly through a crack in the fogbank they saw him. Onto the landing area the big ship settled with ease and care. There was that hesitant sigh as the wheels touched the ground and the little rubbing scruff of the tires, and the triumphant singing roar of the engines bursting forth; then throttling down as he taxied toward the hangar. The men smiled a little at each other and went back to work.

The first month, the month of November passed. The weather was uniformly rotten and there was only one plane in the hangar. So there was actually little to do. The personnel grew in strength so that when the day came to move out of Walla Walla it was a far larger outfit leaving than it had been on arriving.

The Squadron moved out on November 27th and made an uneventful trip in two sections of a train, both leaving Walla Walla about eight o'clock that evening.

### III

This was the 27th of November. Two days earlier a troop train had borne me into Salt Lake City for assignment to my permanent unit. As a mechanic. As a specialist on the B-17. As a very unhappy person.

I knew I couldn't carry the joke much further. It wasn't so much "me" I was worried about. It was the lives of the crew members of whatever ship I'd be assigned to! The war was bad enough. Something had to be done. Even at the sacrifice of my pride and my dignity.

"Captain," I said, desperately, to the officer in the Salt Lake Air Base office. "Somebody's made a terrible mistake!"

"How?" he said quietly.

"I'm not really a mechanic. I don't know *anything* about mechanical work." He looked down at my Form 20. It was all written on that damned card.

"But you've been through two schools!" he said somewhat thickly.

"I know. I know all that. But the Army did it. I didn't learn anything. I just can't get mixed up in it." The last came from me in agony.

"Well," he continued to look at the card. "There's nothing I can do about it. You should have said something before you got into the schools."

"Should have said something!" I just looked at him. Hell, I didn't know I was going to the school until I was in. And then it was too late! They kept saying after you got out of school you could do something. Well, I was out and I still couldn't do anything. I just looked at him.

He looked from the card to me. Then back to the card.

"You've got enough qualification for Officers school," he said. "When you get to your permanent unit, you just tell them and apply for OCS. That's the way out."

It was the only way out. The next day the prospective officer candidate was placed in a day coach and borne out from Salt Lake across acres of salt flats to the Utah-Nevada line, to a stop called Wendover, which is in Utah but which lops over into Nevada. That's the illegal end of town.

The first sight of Wendover Army Air Base, Utah, in those days, was not good. I have a hunch it still looks awful. There isn't much man can do to a place like Wendover. Nature beat us to it.

The town was infinitesimal, consisting of several gas stations of the last-stop-for-one-hundred-miles variety, two restaurants, a coal yard, and a few scattered dwellings. All were begrimed from an almost constant shower of coal dust thrown off from passing trains or swirled down from the coal yard loader. The town's main and only street is the Salt Lake-Reno highway which comes off the salt flats on the eastern edge of town, speeds through and edges its way over the little knoll that grounds the State Line Hotel and on into Nevada. The western border of the base parallels the state line of Nevada and Utah. This is where they brought me, mechanic by training, officer candidate by desire, and destined to be latrine orderly by command that same evening!

The next day was the 28th and I spent the day wrapped in my thoughts cleaning out a row of barracks for the impending arrival of the 100th Bomb Group to which I was to be assigned. I could do nothing until I was assigned. The next day was the 29th and the day after that the 30th. On the 29th my thoughts and I cleaned some more barracks, mopping and sweeping and making up cots and stuff like that. On the 30th I hit a new high. I cleaned, in company with three other mechanics, the foulest kitchen known to man. But so long as I was removed from the thought of mechanical work I was willing. I personally volunteered (this was in the days when I did volunteer) to clean the stove, which I finished at ten-thirty that night to no thanks from anyone and one query from a bunk mate as to whether I had been down having a beer. The next day was the 1st of December. On the 1st of December I joined the 350th Bomb Squadron. Though, since I was there first and made all preparation for them, I prefer to think of it as the 350th joining me. Whichever way it was, I was, like Flynn, in.

#### IV

The Group came into Wendover. Officers and men alike took one look at the surrounding countryside and were unimpressed. They clambered from the trains and lugged their equipment down the dirt roads of the camp to the area that had been set aside for their use during the month. They grabbed bunks in the various tarpapered barracks, each department settling by itself. They tramped around the graveled area with dismay scrawled across their faces. Boy, this was a hole!

The little clump of new men who had spent the previous days cleaning up the place for their arrival were shepherded into the building that housed the Group Headquarters. From there they were assigned to the particular squadron that needed them.

I went to the 350th. After I had found myself a bunk in the long low barracks next to that same kitchen that I had so industriously cleaned the day before, a kid named Ken Davis from the Orderly Room arrived on the scene to tell me that I was



to go on up to the Officers' quarters, make the Colonel's bed and keep his fire going through the night. So I spent my first night in the 350th there in the corridors of the Colonel's quarters. It was during my struggle to make the Colonel's bed that I met the Group Commander. He wound up virtually making his own bed. He impressed me. I don't think I impressed him.

I got back to the Squadron area the next morning. There was some guy in the barracks who said Sergeant Kirn, the First Sergeant, wanted to see me. He'd been wanting to see me since the night before! I had coal dust on my face, I needed a shave, but I'd met Kirn the day before. My soldierly instinct told me I'd better go see him.

"And where in hell have you been?" Kirn jutted his jaw and stood just behind the little wooden railing that separated the Squadron from the orderly room personnel. He waited for his answer.

"You sent me to take care of the Colonel's fire all night," I said meekly. Kirn was a large man, about six foot, with thinning brown hair and large Germanic features. He also had a very loud voice which he was to use with effect in the months to come.

"Lieutenant Bartlett wants to see you," he said abruptly, and pushed the swinging gate open to let me in. He pointed through the office to a little alcove where a lank Lieutenant sat back, his feet propped against the desk. I heard Bartlett's voice before I met Bartlett.

I stepped in, saluted and got ready to apply for OCS.

Bartlett reached over and got my Form 20 and gazed at it for a moment. I shifted and waited. After a moment he looked up at me.

"Will you tell me how in hell you got into AM school?" he said with apparent interest. I splayed my fingers out at my side.

"I don't know, sir. I—just did."

"Do you like mechanical work?" The tone of Bartlett's voice implied I didn't, that I couldn't.

"No, sir." I opened my mouth to apply for OCS.

"We need a man with experience in the orderly room. Want it?"

I did. And I went to work in the orderly room. I got to know everyone in the orderly room, naturally, before I knew anyone else. There was the CO, Captain Clevon, but he flew a lot and was in and out and I never knew much about him, except that he liked candy, movies and flying and everyone who was in the squadron in Walla Walla seemed pretty sold on him. The adjutant whose room was just beyond the big open office, Lieutenant Varian, I got to know fairly well. He was a young man who worked very hard and late at night. He was the one the Captain called "Little Chum". Lieutenant Bartlett, who was the Statistical officer, dropped in and out of the office and seemed to be the guy who did most of the assigning of the new personnel. He was dry and personable and quite unperturbed about assigning mechanics to be clerks and cooks to be latrine orderlies. Everyone else seemed to think he was doing all right and I knew he'd done okeh with me so I guess he was. Lieutenant Tienken had his supply room on the other end of the long building from the orderly room and when I picked up my blankets he was buried in a pile of dirty bedding, being extricated by his two assistants, a tall spindly southerner named Thomas Whitmire, and a little fat Pennsylvanian named Jimmie Rinaldi. The orderly room force I got to know as I worked with them.

There was Kirn the king pin, the first soldier, who had been in the Army for what was a long time then, had been in Honolulu and all over the states. He knew probably more about what was going on around him than anybody else, officers included. Everybody knew it and let him alone. He had things pretty much his own way.

Kirn had a remarkable brain. He went plowing around the squadron area getting all the new men in the right barracks, in the right beds, his brain full of

charts and forms and things that had to be done. At the first he had a staff who didn't know anything, aside from Harold Garic, who did know his payroll, and Peterson, who did know the Morning Report. But the rest of them sat around waiting for Kirn to explain what he wanted done, to give them the shove. So he had all that to cope with. He also felt it necessary to keep a weather eye on what Lieutenants Varian and Bartlett were doing with the personnel assignments, too. He had his days cut out for him. He lost his temper frequently and loudly, as first sergeants generally do.

So there was Kirn. And Peterson who didn't like Kirn and was second in command in the office. Garic, who had charge of the payrolls and the records. He got a new assistant in Wendover, a tall, heavy Texas man, Pat Chandler, as well as his Walla Walla assistant, Jim Tipton. The others in the office on December 1st were a boy named Herman Lingo who made out wills and powers-of-attorney for anybody who wanted one and did general clerical work, and Kenneth Davis, who was a general clerk. And me, pretty general, too.

Next door to the orderly room was Sergeant Jackson's radio shack over which Jackson and his officer, Lieutenant Malcolm Clouter, presided. Clouter was a new officer to the squadron, although he had been originally assigned to the Group headquarters out of Boise. He and the squadron's original communications officer, Lieutenant Alfred Iannacone, had changed places along the way. He and Jackson ran the radio shop which consisted of maintaining the radio equipment in the aircraft and in all allied radio and telephone work. There were a couple of others working in there, too. Thomas A. Madel, who was a sort of combination ground and flying radio operator mechanic, and Edward F. Dolezal, who seemed to know his onions on the communications line, and Howard DeLeeuw, who knew what was what, too.

The rest of the squadron area was devoted to barracks, two rows of them extending down to the main road through camp. At the end of the first row the little white dispensary hut, in which Captain John W. Hardy supervised the giving of shots and the dispensing of pills, aided by a tall, needle-like person named Jensen, who was replaced by transfer during the Wendover stay by short, un-needle-like, Walter Kane, a very satisfying man with the hypodermic. At the end of the second parallel row of barracks was the kitchen and mess hall. It was all pretty compact, pretty much built for living, but not much more.

On the first of December the air crews finally arrived. That is, finally to the men who had been waiting for them since they started out from Boise. Led by Captain Richard Carey the echelon circled the field and came down on the landing ramps on the edge of the salt flats. Soon after the Orderly Room and the Operations office were packed with leather-clad officers and enlisted men trying (1) to see if they could get a pass, (2) to get their living quarters settled immediately, (3) to get a bed for some sleep. The ground men stood around and studied them with interest. This was the big time. These were the "glamour boys". Now the squadron had airplanes and airmen. Now the squadron was an outfit, an organization. The ground personnel looked the airmen over. They were not much impressed.

More ground personnel arrived from Salt Lake City and these armorers, engineers, communications men were absorbed immediately, either into their trained department or into the slot in which the Squadron felt they could serve best. The adjutant and the statistical officer made the assignments while the officers in charge of each of the technical sections watched jealously from outside the circle to see that no other department got the men earmarked for them. They were not always successful.

On December 2nd a list of promotions came out, paying off the fruits of labor that past month in Walla Walla. Departments swelled and the heads went up a notch or two. Divisions of rank began to show. For, up until this time, most of the personnel had no rank at all. Aside from the original cadre who were mostly

corporals and buck sergeants, all the newer men, straight from the training schools and the replacement depots, were plain, unvarnished privates. A new outfit had a lot of room on the T/O for ratings and the guys that got there first were the best off later. Rank with its problems had begun to show its ugly head.

There was little to do in Wendover in the off hours. There was, as I have said, no town at all. Just the State Line Hotel on the brow of the hill just over the Nevada line. But since the gambling facilities were "off limits" to enlisted personnel and liquor was extremely high in price, the State Line didn't seem to appeal much to them. So the men began to place all emphasis on the twenty-four hour pass that came each week. Some men took theirs and went down into Salt Lake City, a trip that required four hours to make on a rickety old stage across the sighing highway over the salt flats—four hours to go east by the clock—two hours to come back, due to the time change between the base and the town. The other men headed for Elko and Ely, Nevada, to bring back unholy stories of their doings there. Each man came back with an entirely different tale to tell and the men in the barracks sprawled on their bunks to listen with degrees of interest varying with the degree of their own personal experiences.

Most of them had a good time. Though many a heartache and headache rode back to Wendover on the shoulders of a soldier who'd been to Nevada.

During the month the Squadron moved along at a steady clipped pace. The air echelon, now well-established, flew night and day, practicing landings and take-offs, practiced bombings on ranges established far out on the empty salt flats, learning their airplanes, learning themselves, learning to work and live together. The ground men went about their job in a similar manner. The engineers, which were what the airplane mechanics were called, learned about the Flying Forts by working on them, keeping them in a flyable condition. They found out, as did the communications men fresh out of training school, the armorers and all the other trained personnel. that theory was one thing but actual practice was something else. A ship's appearance pulled apart in an illustration wasn't always what it looked like dragged across the icy surface of the Wendover ramp. The men would go out bundled up in their great leather, wool-lined line clothes to try and figure the whole thing out. They learned to work together, too, in crews, in shifts like the airmen. The whole purpose of the training was to get the Squadron, maintenance, flying, administration and all, working together inter-dependent on each other in order to achieve the best possible results.

There were lots of changes in original assignments. Some men just weren't cut out for the jobs for which they had been trained. When this happened those men had to be shifted, put into another slot and tried out there. If they failed to work out in that place, too, as well, they were transferred to another squadron or out of the Group all together so that they would not hinder the growth of the whole. It was a long, drawn-out process of weeding out, trying for size, officers and enlisted men alike.

As the month wore on the weather got colder and colder. Once or twice some snow fell but did not stick long. The whole Squadron was bundled up and dragged out to the firing range out on the flats but the weather was bitter enough to discourage marksmanship. The results weren't much to talk about.

While the Squadron had been stationed at Walla Walla it had been decided that one distinctive touch was needed. That would be the little leather insignie which could be sewed on the leather jackets of the ground and airmen. What kind of a design was to be pressed on the leather was a matter of deep speculation. Finally four of the men put their heads together and hit on it.

Sergeants Lawrence Bowa, Richard Hawkins, Louis Hays and Private Homer Parker (who did the actual design) got their heads working and came out with a design which would show a Gremlin—the little imaginary men who were so



popular in 1942—standing in the sky holding onto a cloud with his left hand while extended in his right he would hold an inverted chamber pot, with bombs pouring out and down. It was novel, if not dignified. While December worked its way out at Wendover, the finished product arrived, printed and painted on leather and soon made its appearance all over the base. It was the first insignia to show in the Group. Needless to say, the design drew comment. Christmas cards were printed showing the design which the men sent out to unsuspecting relatives and friends.

The fame of the Gremlin grew and spread and brought forth a letter of acknowledgment and appreciation from New York, from Boris Artzybasheff, noted LIFE artist, creator of the Gremlin design. The 350th was beginning to be some stuff!

One bitterly-cold morning just before Christmas the Squadron marched out to the ramp, flopping along in their great overcoats, disagreeable and uncomfortable, following the little blue guidon which fluttered at their head for the first time. They lined themselves up in tiered rows for their first and only picture as a unit. Banked grimly before a Fort named "Frenchy" they stared at the camera and set themselves into posterity in a picture which was to grace mantels, walls in homes and offices all over the country in all pride and loyalty.

More men kept coming to the organization every few days. The bombsight officer, Lieutenant Richard C. Nordrum, joined and enlisted personnel flowed in ten or so every other day. Strength totals climbed toward the Table of Organization strength. The Squadron was nearing its maturity.

Christmas came to Wendover and found the Squadron a little homesick. Except for the real "old timers" it was the first Christmas in the Army for most of the men. They tried not to think of what the folks might be doing. They sort of banded themselves into a conspiracy of forgetfulness. But home was there, nevertheless. It was in the way the wind blew, in the tang of the air itself. It was in the corner of every package that arrived, in the folds of every home-knit sweater and sock. Home was beside the pillow after the lights in the barracks went out, after the voices died away to slide into snores and sighs. Home was very close and yet very far away.

The mess hall did its part, though. A little Christmas tree complete with tinsel and lights did a lot to warm the atmosphere and a meal fit for any American Christmas did a lot to warm the stomachs. The mail orderly tried to cope with the onrush of packages . . . he was a tall, broad Texan, Private Ambus Morris, not much of a Santa Claus-looking character . . . but he fought his way good-naturedly through the maze and took it in good stride. After all, it was Christmas. Our first Christmas together. At the dinner in the mess hall (the Colonel even came!) there was a lot of laughter and a lot of kidding. I guess it was the Christmas dinner that hung the nickname "Shadow" on to Al Strain. Two of the men on the line, big wheels in the Engineering department in those early days, Master Sergeants Albert Strain and Wilbur Leyboldt struck up a pretty fast friendship. Strain was a little fellow from somewhere in the East, Penn I think, while Lee was a tall, rangy character. He'd been a cop on a motorcycle in Nevada and California before the war. Lee had the long legs and Strain the short ones, so wherever they went it was Lee who led the way, with Strain a close second. It was Vic Pacek, a big engineer himself, who first called Strain "Shadow". It stuck from that Christmas on. While Lee became "Cookie", though, no one quite knew why. There must have been a reason; in the Army nicknames generally mean something.

Emergency furloughs came and went; no other furloughs were granted. Just before Christmas Pat Chandler, the Texan in the orderly room, got word his father was to have an operation in Dallas. It was an emergency all right. Only the Colonel of the Group could okeh the leave and he was off the base. Sergeant Kirn went into action. For some nineteen hours he phoned, hunted, pleaded, begged and finally got permission to release Chandler, who sat miserably and sweated and waited. Chandler left immediately for Texas and got there to see his Dad safely through. If

Kirn hadn't fought for it, he'd never have gotten out of Wendover at all. But that was the First Sergeant's job, to look out for his men.

Lieutenant Varian was a very new adjutant still. He was very self-conscious and very much determined to be military and rigid in his manner. So when Private Nugget Bernadac asked permission of the first sergeant to speak to the adjutant and Kirn brought the message into Varian's office, Varian remembered his duty to his men. Kirn ushered Nugget into the office and Nugget saluted properly and asked if he might sell shoes to the men in the outfit, civilian shoes, that is. Varian very kindly and yet firmly told him the Army didn't allow that sort of thing, selling within the ranks and that the project was out. Bernadac was okeh, he understood. And his business was concluded. He stepped back a pace and Varian, anticipating his salute, half-raised his own hand and then halted transfixed and stunned.

Nugget took a pace back and brought his hand up, smartly and rigidly. Not in salute though. He performed the famed Churchill "V" sign, pivoted and strode from the office. Varian swallowed and a flush swarmed up into his cheeks. There wasn't much he could think to do. So he did the best thing he could in the circumstances. He chewed on his lower lip for a minute, picked up his pencil and went back to work. No one mentioned it until much later.

On the 27th of December the Squadron was "alerted". There was to be another troop movement; another month of training had been completed. Again the movement was preceded by rumor. It is safe to say that over fifty percent of the personnel knew the destination of each movement the Squadron made at least three days in advance of the actual movement. No one knows how they get out. But Army rumors are fairly accurate, always well in advance. Even overseas rumors.

The Squadron was to move out on the morning of the 1st day of January, 1943. That New Year's Eve was a joyous occasion. The Day Room, scene of the reading of the Articles of War, gas lectures, sex lectures, and the other odds and ends of administration, was crowded to the gills and from somewhere liquor came and was plentiful. There were heads that throbbed throughout the next day's movement. This was the end of a good year, after all; the beginning of an adventurous one. That was reason to celebrate. They were pulling up the stakes from Wendover . . . that, too, was reason enough for celebration.

## V

The morning of the 1st was cold and sharp in Utah. Most of the Squadron was dragged out of the sack at four in the morning and, considering the rigors of the night before, most of them realized for the first time that "war was hell". They packed their barracks bags and piled them outside the barracks for loading, put on their overcoats and sat disconsolately on the edges of their bunks waiting for the word to go. Varian, Tienken and the First Sergeant handled most of the arrangements, making frequent and irritable trips from the area to the parked train and back to the area again, flying around in the cold in the jeep with the big CO on the windshield. Finally, they called the men out in ranks and called the roll, waited for somebody to get out of the latrine and into the ranks. At eight o'clock the Squadron moved out, a great straggling line of threes, dark, drab and OD against the thinly-spread snow, stumbling and shuffling along the streets of the base, to the tracks where the train waited. No one said much. It was too cold; too many had their own thoughts. But everybody was ready to leave. They clambered on the train and fell into their seats, staring moodily out at the low, sunken roofs of the base. There were no tears shed for Wendover as the train pulled out on the morning of the first of the year.

Night came. The train had passed Ogden and was heading up the grade into Wyoming. By this time it was an open truth that the destination was Sioux City, Iowa. But, in train movements, there is always the doubt that somebody could have gotten the lead twisted. Speculation continued. Soldiers in the States on troop



movements speculate most generally by trying to bribe the porter into telling the destination. Porters can be very close-mouthed.

Accommodations were excellent. Particularly noticeable with the Orderly Room clerks who had nabbed off a car of compartments and bedrooms, offering the feeble excuse that they had to have a private room in which to do the orderly room work. As if any of them ever worked on a train! Except Peterson, who typed "No change" in the Morning Report and tucked it away. Morale was good; even if you had to wait until it was your car's turn, then file down through the reconditioned baggage car with your mess kit and cup, praying all the time some jerk didn't spill his coffee all over you, then stagger back through the swaying train to your seat with a plate heaped with food and the always ever-menacing coffee. There was no work to do. The Squadron sat back in their seats and watched Wyoming slip past. Some of them gathered around Johnny Riffle who had a guitar and sang all the old West Virginia favorites like "Precious Jewel" and "Wabash Cannonball". Some of them played little minor games of poker and blackjack; others read; others just sat or slept. All of them waited.

The train hit Laramie the next morning and then swung off to Denver where it laid over for an hour to let the crew clean and re-water. The fact that they laid over too far from town to give the men a chance to get into the city was probably to the good. As it was, one man missed the train out. Late that night a feverish Lieutenant Varian gave a sigh of relief as he watched the lone figure gallop up the station platform in McCook, Nebraska, to rejoin the unit. At a reduced grade, rock-bottom.

The train crossed Nebraska during the second night. Shortly before Omaha it swung to the north, confirming all rumors as to where the Squadron was going. I say, Squadron; actually there were two Squadrons on the train. And the other two of the Group following on the train behind.

About noon the train crossed the Missouri River into a sleety, snowy, windy Sioux City. Hope ran high—for, at least, Sioux City was larger. After Wendover, Sioux City looked like Manhattan. Pfc Arnold C. Creighton was happy too. He lived in Sioux City.

The train went through the town and finally came to a halt for a moment beside a small highway hamlet named, picturesquely enough, Sergeant Bluff. Then slowly it warped and crawled slowly along the curve of a spur into the Base. A large, well-ordered base. From the train windows, from the steam-heated interior of the train, it looked pretty promising this 3rd of January.

## VI

The men bolted from the train once it came to a halt. Bolted out into weather that registered about fifteen degrees below zero. They bolted right back into the warm train! There were a lot of the boys who had never seen snow before—like me, boys from the west and the south—and temperatures like this were something you had read about and somehow didn't quite believe! It was there. Lieutenant Varian had talked pretty big about having been in snow in his native Baltimore before, he knew just how to deal with the matter. He went out into this blast. Five minutes later observers, delighted observers, from the train windows could see his ear turning pale and milky white, but so unmistakably. For the next three days the Adjutant wore a becoming turban of cotton and gauze, along with a very martyred expression. He also refrained from discussing ice in any form.

There were more pratt-falls that afternoon than have been seen in the history of the Orpheum circuit. The men walked archly, limply, with welted bruises on their fannies. I should say "we", there. But we survived. It was a new kind of Squadron area we bedded down in that night. Nice, big, two-storied barracks and

lots of room. Central heating too, though I could understand why with thermometers reading as they were.

In the meantime after we had left Wendover the air echelon, who rode around in their B-17's and shunned train travel, had been making a tour en route to Sioux City from Wendover. Taking off the day following the departure of the train, the planes, led by Colonel Alkire, flew down into Texas and made their way by easy stages up into the Iowan cold. A number of the ground men flew with the Squadron ships as members of the crew, gaining first-hand knowledge of flying conditions, having themselves a rip-roaring time in addition.

The day after the ground personnel had settled in Sioux City, Captain Clevlen brought in the air echelon. Once again the Squadron was complete, ready for business. This was the beginning of the third—the final phase of work. This was the threshold of war.

This was the last stage of training. From Sioux City the Squadron was set to proceed to a staging area and from there it was business. The Squadron was ready for it. Most of them, that is. During the month, came the issue of tin hats, which slipped down over the ears, looked ridiculous and felt like they weighed a ton. We got other hunks of equipment. There could be no doubt the American Army was the best equipped in the world. And there were times in our careers when we figured we had most of it! They took away our khaki clothes. There was a lot of talk about how and when the move would come. This was the one time, the only time, that rumor seemed a little stagnant. And for good reason, too.

It was a month of terrible temperatures. Once, it went to twenty-five below! And when, in that swirling billowing mass of snow, the mercury slid down to 10 below—and then to 15—and finally to 25, the place just shuttered up for the time being. The planes were covered and the men wouldn't even go outside the buildings except for food. Two days the paralysis lasted. Then the indicator began a sluggish climb back up to sunny zero again and work resumed, hesitantly at first, and then surely.

A lot more men joined the unit and a couple of them left it, among them Davis, the kid in the orderly room. Another kid, I've forgotten his name, managed to get a Congressman or Senator to intervene for him and he got out of the Group to go to Officers' school. It was a rarity. The Group, not anxious to lose their trained personnel before going overseas, didn't exactly refuse to allow people to apply for OCS. They just didn't okeh the applications. Which was nice. My own ambitions to be an officer had been forgotten. I had a job I liked. I felt at home with the 350th.

Sioux City was a good town. The boys got along well and "going to town" became a habit instead of the occasion it had been in Wendover. The dances at the Skylon ballroom, the drinks and the girls at the Ratskeller, the good beds at the Martin hotel and the Warrior, the good food at Charley's Steak House, the wild trips across the line into South Dakota, became the attractions. They began to know each other, to like each other. They worked very well, indeed.

During the early part of the month a scare swept through the base when a man died of spinal meningitis in another Squadron and almost immediately Private Arthur Moore, one of the engineers, fell desperately ill with the same thing. He passed through a tough period and this outbreak caused his entire barracks to be quarantined. For a week the line-men marched to and from their work under virtual guard. But Moore passed his crisis, luckily, and the ban was finally lifted. All was well.

There was a honey of a post exchange on the field. That meant a good many meals were taken there where the waitresses apparently had more of a serving skill than the Squadron KP's. Perhaps, it was the change of scenery. The juke box was good too. The big nicker-getter was a song called "Seems to Me I've Heard that Song Before."

Along towards the end of the month there came a restriction. Suddenly that suspension broke with the announcement that all members of the command, the whole of the Group personnel, were to meet in the theatre building for a few well-chosen words from Colonel Alkire. Colonel Alkire did not make it a practice of calling a meeting unless it was to explain a point that vitally affected the entire unit. The men remembered his fiery "training for murder" speech in Walla Walla. Those who had not heard him deliver that one had heard the tales from those who had. Everyone went to the meeting with enthusiasm, with a great deal of curiosity. They didn't have to wait long—Alkire let them have it.

The Colonel stepped before the microphone on the stage of the theatre before the black-framed screen to speak briefly and to the point. All plans for overseas duty had been suspended for ninety days. The men thought of their tin hats, of their overseas equipment, of their wives in town. Some of them were mighty glad. Others had gotten ready mentally and they were sorry. But most of them were puzzled and watched the Colonel as he spoke on.

The Group was to proceed from Sioux City to a new base which had been established at Kearney, Nebraska. There they would settle down for the next ninety days. During that time they were to learn and to carry out the business of processing other Groups en route to the combat zone. This meant checking all records, equipment and personnel for final recording prior to the take-off for the combat areas. It was a sort of a come-down job for a unit supposed to be ready for the job of combat itself. A sort of military valet service. The Colonel was obviously disappointed with the orders. Delays were not in his thinking line. But he was no more disappointed than the majority of the men. His announcement met with silence.

The Colonel proceeded to give a little off-the-record talk to the Group on Kearney itself and methods of conduct which were so important. Kearney, he said, was a little farm town tucked away in the west of Nebraska and Kearneyites were none too sure they wanted any part of this great sprawling air base that had mushroomed up out of their cornfields. They had had a corps of unprincipled and badly-disciplined construction troops already. The incidents growing out of this initial introduction had made them a little leery and uncertain. The Colonel had a remedy for this.

"Act like gentlemen, men—at least for the first two weeks!", he begged.

The house roared. The town was respectable, the Colonel said. He himself had stayed at their best hotel, the Fort Kearney, and, as he was being led out of the hotel by the Chamber of Commerce to tour the city, he had noticed in the gutter a trace of their discomfort.

The men were to try. The Colonel asked no more than this. Drinking was to be done in the alleys, not on the main streets. The Colonel expected no more than this. The troops didn't expect much either. They went home from the theatre. Home, that is, to the barracks and offices with the Colonel's words on their minds. It was Kearney instead of war—for a time. There were seven days left of Sioux City. Things happened in one-two-three order that last seven days!

First, the Captain became the Major! He was now Major Cleven—Squadron Commander. The men were as glad as he was that day. Then Lieutenant Varian stepped up a notch to become a First Lieutenant. Lieutenants Tienken and Clouter, Blazer and McMahon all followed suit—each became a first lieutenant. Silver replaced gold all around. Up a notch—was the order of the day. Lesser in rank but no less proud—a lot of Privates became Privates first class, and so on up. There were a great many cigars being passed around. In fact, one newly-created sergeant had so many cigars given to him that, when his own promotion came through, he simply passed around the other peoples' cigars!

The Major thought things had come along right well with his unit so far. It had, too. It was decided that before the unit went to Kearney they'd have a party. The



ballroom at the Martin Hotel was reserved and a lot of girls were invited through the Sioux City clubs and the great night finally rolled around.

It was a good party. There was a lot of liquor and a lot of girls of all kinds; the food was good, and so was the orchestra. It was a huge success. A lot of people kept disappearing upstairs for a little while during the evening and popping back into the party with regularity. A lot of others apparently got the mistaken idea the party was held in the hotel bar. A lot of people did nothing but eat. Some just danced with their eyes closed. Some just sat on the sidelines and watched. Some went to sleep on the divans in the lounge, didn't they? Every man did what he wanted to do. Everyone had a good time. Even one very quiet sergeant, so generally quiet and reserved, so painfully respectful and obvious about officers' ranks, had a good time. He hit Lieutenant Clouter first, genially greeting him with a "Hi Malcolm" that transfixed the enlisted men around the room. And then Varian caught it as he became "Handsome Horace" loudly and clearly. The sergeant demanded that "Handsome Horace" accompany him downstairs to the bar for a drink. "Handsome Horace" went along. That's the kind of a guy he was. That's the kind of a party it was.

The coming move to Kearney, Nebraska, meant a split in the Squadron set-up, for the air echelon was not to be stationed at Kearney during the ninety-day processing period. Instead, the pilots and their crews were to be shipped out to various other bases in Nebraska and Wyoming where they would act as instructors to more fledgling Groups. Some of them were to go to Scott's Bluff and Ainsworth, in Nebraska, and others were to go out to Casper, Wyoming.

But with all this there was the promise that things were to be the same as before, when the job at Kearney had been completed. The Colonel had said that that morning on the stage of the theatre. But rumor and talk were rife. There seemed to be a lot of people who said that the Group was to be broken up into little segments—even as their parent Group before them had been. The segments would become new Groups all over again. That when the air echelon went away that morning in January we would never see them again. And go they did—pilots, co-pilots, navigators, bombardiers, and the enlisted crews, gunners, mechanics, radio men, over fifty of the Squadron's personnel. The men on the ground watched them go off into the cold, clear, warmless sunlight of the Iowa morning. They watched them with a little sad feeling—because this was the first split. Those were their planes, over which they'd sweated and come to know. Those were men from the Squadron who flew them. Somebody was leaving home for the first time. The Major, thank heaven, didn't go. He was a flying man, but he was the CO, too. If he wanted to go with his crews, he couldn't. If he wanted to stay, he did. The ground echelon was happy about that, at least.

The time in Sioux City passed out of the picture.

## VII

On the 2nd of February orders again started the 350th off down the steel trail. This time they didn't get the plush and steel accommodations. The Squadron marched through the Base and came to the warehouses at the north end of the field to find that the trains had not even arrived. It was early evening and it was raining, though the cold snaps of the month had broken. That was slight comfort at least. They stood in the wind and the rain for about an hour, grumbling and discontented, while the water dripped down their raincoats on to their legs and on down into their shoes. Finally, the coaches arrived. It's a wonder they came at all. These were museum pieces, pure and simple. They were awful! The men climbed on board and flopped into seats that protested loudly and repulsed them as forcibly as they could. The men sprawled on the rough solid seats and glumly took stock. In the corner of each coach was a large pregnant-looking stove with a little corkscrew

chimney that curved and poked itself out through the roof of the carriage. They were all-wooden cars, and cold (the stove being inoperative). The men were crowded into them like a bunch of refugees fleeing the hordes. Kearney lies about three hundred miles west of Sioux City, a twelve-hour jump by rail. For such a small jaunt the railroad company must have scoured their memory books, and dug up the relics. These made Stephenson's Folly look like a stratoliner! The men huddled themselves together on the hard seats, spread their overcoats over their bodies, shifted their wet feet out of the clinging, heavy shoes and prepared for a long, hard night—They arrived at Kearney next morning about nine, after a long, hard night—cramped, dirty, with an assortment of varied aching backs. They arrived none too happy and, oddly enough, quite mentally prepared for what they saw.

## VIII

Kearney from a train window is a miserable, depressing sight. Kearney from the hoof is doubly unengaging. The men sat in their seats of discomfort and gazed dispassionately out at the base standing stark and new in the fields of dead and sear cornstalks. The train hunched itself off the main line onto a spur and sidled up to the warehouse landing. It seemed the Army always unloaded between warehouses. This was no exception.

They piled out of the train, fell into ranks, screwing their backs into little furrowed mounds to get the packs set right, trying to keep everything in balance and order and, at the same time, follow the barked commands from the First Sergeant and his pack of snapping aides. Finally, with difficulty, the lines were formed and started out of the warehouse alley down the long road into the interior of the base.

It was a new installation and, as such, everything had that wide-open vacant look, as though bull-dozer had just passed through and swept all the character and native charm, if any, of the place into little heaps and passed on, leaving a scraped, empty look to everything. The buildings were newly erected and had that funny, temporary look to them, flat against the sky without relief of any kind. The Squadron marched down into this desolate looking base that was to be home for the next ninety days. They were very much unimpressed.

The barracks were not the double-storied, heated ones of Sioux City, but instead the long, low one-storied barracks that had been at Wendover. The principal difference was that here in Nebraska the fires never seemed to accomplish what they had in Utah. It was cold in Kearney and more than one night the little running blasts of cold air sneaked their way under the blankets and comforters and we woke in the dark and shivered. Home . . . was never like this.

The weather, we were to find, had the staggers. It staggered constantly. From zero to any point on the thermometer and then it would make a "to the rear march" and collapse without notice to zero again. When it wasn't cold—or, rather, when it was cool—the wind blew. When the wind blew the dust rose off the face of Nebraska in great swirling clouds that blanketed everything and everybody, obscuring even the building immediately across the road. It was a penetrating dust—the dust lined your clothing and got into your teeth, clung next to your skin and matted in your hair. There was nothing to do to combat it. Just wait until the wind died down and start combing and brushing and scrubbing. And cuss like the devil when the wind cooked up a new and even more formidable batch to cope with!

One day it would blow. The next day it would snow. The following morning would be spring-y and warm. Mid-afternoon the wind came again, the temperature fell and it would snow that evening. Next day, warm, snow turns to mud. Snow and/or dust the following day. Kearney was a problem. Kearney was Nature's horse laugh on mankind. It was a long laugh—ninety days worth. Maybe, Fate had something worse than that after the ninety days. We tried to see it that way and accept what we had graciously, yet with reserve. But the problem was too

immediate, too present. Each, in his own way, moaned and suffered and said "let tomorrow take care of itself".

But everyone took it in his stride. We all fell into the routine of things, went to work learning how to do the new job, to do it as well as we could. Because, even though we weren't going right off to war, not just yet—this was a job, like all the others, that had to be done.

The Squadron had hardly gotten its feet onto the Nebraska plain when tragedy struck quickly, without warning. It was our first tragedy and we were so very unprepared to lose anyone—just yet.

Among the crews that had left Sioux City to put in the extra time at the dispersed bases was one of the original crews that had come to us in Wendover. It was Lieutenant Paul Capaccio's crew with Lieutenant Jacob Madsen, and Flight Officer Latimer Stewert. They had gone to Casper, Wyoming. On the same day we got to Kearney they received orders to fly with a skeleton crew to Kansas. Capaccio and Madsen had the controls with Stewert and two of their enlisted men with them, Staff Sergeants Thaddeus Donlavage and Frank Culver. No one ever knew quite what happened. Somehow, as the plane neared Bogue, Kansas, something happened. The big Fort arched out of the flat skies to bury itself in the middle of a cornfield. All five were killed outright.

These were the very first to go. Their passing threw a deep gloom over the Squadron. They went, flying in their ship, as they might have wanted it to be. The Squadron took a deep breath and went on, remembering them.

The processing work turned into a headache immediately. It meant that each of the Squadrons within the Group had to pool their talents. Their clerks from orderly rooms, S-2, tech supply, supply, engineering and the rest met in the big gymnasium and there at assorted tables covering the particular items to be checked, they went to work. There was a long table for technical equipment, a table for legal aid on wills and powers of attorney, a table for locator cards and checking of dog tags and so on. On the stage of the building the medical department held forth, Captain Hardy and Staff Sergeant John Zinkine from the 350th to jab with their shot needles as the processees came through.

The way it worked was this. A crew, complete officers and enlisted men, entered the building with their records and, as they progressed through the gym, they went from table to table and across the stage being checked and re-checked until at length they emerged from the building supposedly all in order, ready to leave for overseas. They were not allowed any freedom off the post into town and their stay was limited to a few days only. There were as many as thirty-six crews at one time within the building from beginning to end and there was an uninterrupted flow through that front door. It was gruelling and most uninteresting work. But the men did a good job.

Out on the line the maintenance men, the engineers and all the rest, had a job to do, too. They checked the planes for modifications, changes that had been recommended and adopted by the Air Force since the building of the plane, and for the general condition on the ship. By the time that these Groups left the field they were supposed to be ship-shape in every sense. They were.

For relaxation you could drink beer in the PX, go to the movie on the base, or go to town on an evening pass. When you got a pass you climbed on a bus that circled the field and went down the highway along the railroad tracks into town. The bus would come into Kearney from the east and continue past the little frame houses until it struck the Main street where the monument to Kit Carson stood as a landmark. The bus would turn left and go up the street towards the railroad station, past the World Theatre and the Fort Theatre to the Station that had a big sign in the yards with arrows pointing east and west. On the eastern arrow



is said "New York—1550 miles," and on the western one "San Francisco—1550 miles". What a helluva place to be stuck, right in the dead center!

The men struck out each time for the spot that gave them what they wanted. Some went over to eat at the Fort Kearney Hotel. Others went home to wives who had settled for the ninety days in little rooms all over town. The others, the ones without connections, went into the Silver Dollar and had a beer or down to the soda parlour on the corner for some ice cream or a coke. More or less all of them wound up later in the evening out at the Armory. The Armory stood some blocks past the railroad tracks, a large well-built hall across from the county seat and courthouse. There was a dance there on Tuesday and Thursday and Friday night. The affair that took place on Saturday night to a rube orchestra was not so much of a dance as it was a gallop. But the men got so that they would even go to those once in a while. Some of them learned the Paul Jones and the Virginia Reel. Some of them found friends in the little town, which was a pretty good trick if you could do it, since the populace wasn't much for soldiers. The Colonel had been right!

Some of them found friends among the women in town. Some found friends among the girls from the Nebraska State Teachers' College that stood at the end of the highway beyond the Kit Carson monument. As the days passed the men fell into the habits that were Kearney. They'd go to town on Friday and Saturday. Some went to the World Theatre and sat through King of the Royal Mounted as each week's chapter unreeled. And liked it so much they began right in on the new serial when it started. G-Men vs. the Black Dragon, it was called, and was pretty well into its intrigues before we left Kearney. You could always go on over to the Fort, too, because their Friday and Saturday specialties were cowboy pictures. No matter at which one you wound up, it would be with a gal and a bag of popcorn. Life was very simple in Kearney.

Ben's Place, out of town, was popular with the night club crowd and The White Spot between the field and the town was another. A few of the boys went up to Grand Island for the evening. An ordnance factory there had a lot of women. That's what they liked. Women. One fellow had a girl in North Platte, ninety miles to the west. He managed to see her once in a while. If he couldn't see her, he phoned—collect. After the unit left Kearney—she found out about that—the collect business, so she said in her letter to the adjutant, was no good. Must have cost her quite a bit, all in all.

Along about the middle of February the soldier's dream came true! Furloughs! Furloughs of seven days' duration were authorized. From the fifteenth of the month on men went and came, went gladly and excitedly, came back tired and happy. They went everywhere. Some to Maine and some to California; some to Louisiana; some to North Dakota; some even to Nebraska. All over the United States the little thin threads of the Squadron stretched as its members went home for a day or two. The men who lived in New York or Maine or California had the hard lot, for their travel took two days in each direction and that left them a scant few days at home. But even a few days was a break. Most of them had never been home since their own particular morning when they set out for the Induction station. They came home now to say good-bye.

While all this was going on, as March started, came the old rumor that the Group was going to split up again. This time it was more persistent than ever. The Group had outlived its usefulness for combat. The processing job had done it. It would be split into little units as had been hinted before. Some said these units would become station complements—stationed permanently, doing just what they were doing now. Others held to the new cadre idea. Even the Colonel, this time, admitted to his associates that the situation looked very bad. That's what the Squadron grape-vine reported.

But, as suddenly as it had begun, all this talk died down. Airdrome squadrons—



men trained for permanent stations on bases—came onto the field and settled down to learn the processing work. They were taught thankfully and eagerly by the already tired and bored Squadron clerks. In time it was agreed that the Group—that the Squadron would be freed to do its originally planned, its most important work.

On March 18 Major Cleven called the department heads into his little office and told them that his instructions were that all men were to have completed their furloughs by April 14. The move was on. That, despite all the rumors and all the opinions, all the talk, and all the delays, the 350th was on its way to fight! We heard it all, because the Major's office had a little inch-wide crack at the base board and we, all of us in the north end of the building which was the orderly room, and the south end of the building which was the Operations department, heard it. We let the grape-vine know. Everybody was excited. You could feel that upsurge of interest flooding the whole Squadron. You could see that instant welding together of all departments, all the men, in the purpose of the moment.

Departments which had grown lax and listless with the routine events became as they had been in Wendover and Sioux City. Vitally interested, alive and enthusiastic. Ground school was started for the men to try and teach them the necessities they should know to perform the coming job well—and to protect themselves, too, if need be. There were classes, taught by the men of the unit themselves, in gas warfare and on health, sanitation and current events, methods of air field protection and defense and camouflage. The men went—because they had to—and, because most of them agreed with the training now. They listened and learned and thought of the future and wondered.

I guess the day we all knew we were going to war was the day the Ordnance department received the shipment of brand-new carbine rifles. Somehow you never realize you're going off to war until they put the rifle in your hand. The minute you're charged out with a rifle you aren't just a civilian in uniform any more. You've taken on some of the look and the feel of a potential killer. It's your gun and you might have to use it. Take care of it. It's your friend, your protection. There's nothing you have that's as important to you as your gas mask and your carbine.

Lieutenant John B. Caverly, that nervous, eccentric, dynamic officer, was the Ordnance officer and the men under him, Louis Picardi, Leonard Krzywicki, Nicholas Karaglou and Arthur Ernst, were good men, well trained and, for some reason, all possessors of long service in the Army. They took the Squadron in hand, with their first real work to do, and taught us how to dismantle the gun, to clean, to oil it, to keep it in working order.

Everywhere everyone was doing something to get ready. The clerks were making rosters and checking records and all of that. The supply departments, QM and technical alike, were replacing equipment and issuing out new stuff; the medical departments were checking and giving shots and making sure; people were being weeded out; the men the CO and Adjutant didn't think could take it were being replaced by people who could; things in general were shaping for the future instead of the present, which was still very much with them.

Quite suddenly, as it had in February, tragedy struck again at the Squadron. This time it was a ground man who was lost. Young Staff Sergeant Edward French decided one Saturday evening to go to Grand Island for a night's fun. He took a friend from the Squadron with him and they met a couple of Grand Island girls. Somewhere on the outside of town they had a flat tire on their car. French got out to repair it. The tire replaced, French and the girl started to re-enter the car when they were struck down by a passing car. Both were fatally injured. The other couple were uninjured.

The Squadron was stunned. French was one of the original members of the Squadron and a very talented photographer. At the time of his death, he was engaged in preparing the Squadron scrapbook in addition to his regular duties.

March began to fade away when glamour made its appearance into Kearney. More accurately into the field. With the arrival of the 351st Bombardment Group for processing early in April came one Lieutenant Clark Gable. He of the dark complexion, the moustache, the wide reputation. Handsome, typically dashing, friendly, Gable became the topic of the day. The men of the Squadron—though they denied it—were as curious to see him as any of the Kearney girls who mightly prayed that he would be allowed to come into town. He wasn't. They made for the spots where he might be seen. That is, the men and the women who were lucky enough to work on the field. But Gable was elusive. Few saw him during the short stay. Most did not. Those who saw him buying soap in the PX promptly made out across the field to the barracks to report his presence. To intent questioning as to what, how and why he looked like they replied somewhat laconically, "oh, he looks okeh!"

Overseas activities came a little closer every day. The school system had been placed under the direction of Lieutenant Kenneth R. Welty, he of the tremendous red moustache, and his operations crew, Hale, Vassar, Frank Linderth, and Leonard Dombroski. They had no planes at this time to occupy their Operations efforts so they handled the school. Captain Marvin S. Bowman and Lieutenant Irving Juster from S-2 collaborated with them on this and to good effect. Captain Bowman was always a prime lecture favorite as well as a good friend to every man in the unit.

From Group headquarters came hinting little bulletins and orders. On March 31st a grand show-down inspection was held in the gym. The men donned their field uniforms of leggings, packs, rifles and flight jackets, topped off with the inevitable and uncomfortable helmet, marching as best they could, carrying their A bags with them (one barracks bag to accompany the man was called the A bag). On a folded blanket on the gym floor they spread in neat and prescribed order their belongings—as per regulation and charts. It was important in those days that these things bring credit to the Squadron. They did.

In between all the rest of the things that were going on, the sports program came into full flower, like the spring. Each department made up a team and the afternoons were filled with "kill the umpire" and, seeing that the First Sergeant was the man in question, the sentiment was vociferous!

The month of April arrived and the 14th was dragging along slow but sure. As the sun rose on that morning all the furloughs were completed with the return of the last man on the list. All were back again. The Squadron was full strength and ready. Ready to get down to the last round of preparation for the days to come. The 14th meant that the job was really beginning; all that had gone on before had been play and lax. What was to come was hectic and work. From here on out the job was to become wearing and exhausting, trying to body and mind and soul. This was the beginning of the job that was to bring them to their final phase as trainees—the port of embarkation.

## IX

While all these things were working themselves out and the time for action was drawing steadily to its mark, the internal workings of the Squadron went on. Little changes for more efficiency of operations were made here and there. Corporal Arnold C. Creighton, after a sort of odd-job status in the Orderly Room, took over the handling of the Squadron's transportation problems, assisted by Al Fein. It became their duty to see that the trucks and jeeps were at the proper place at the proper time. During the latter portion of March and the first days of April Master Sergeant Bill Jackson, the communications head, compiled and authored a series of lectures and instruction directives for use by the United States Army Air Force Radio School in Madison, Wisconsin. When Pfc Warren Harris came into the Orderly Room, returning from his furlough, all the wanderers were back. The final phase was being set.

Group Headquarters issued the plans for the training extending over a week or so which had to be met to the letter. When Lieutenant Varian read it he groaned. He carried it into Major Clevon. He groaned, too. When the schedule was posted on the bulletin board for all to read, the whole Squadron groaned. There was no getting away from it, no escape at all. It was law, countersigned by Major Karl Standish, and it would be done! It was. But at what a cost of disposition and good humor!

As the training program swung into action the crews of the air echelon began to trickle back to rejoin the unit after their almost ninety-day absence. The Squadron was glad to see them come back. It was remembered for a long time it had been the general opinion that they would not be coming back. The Major was glad to see them return. They were his boys. It meant his command was complete again.

The training program moved into action both on the ground and in the air. On the ground there was a scheduled round of events. Generally so arranged that the bulk of the Squadron would rise from their bunks in the early morning, dress in their field uniform and go out on an exercise. Lunch, an hour or so for respite, then out on the field for some other exercises that would take the rest of the afternoon. This was set to go on for some ten days. There were calisthenics, drill practice to bring about coordination between commands, and other ordinary set procedures that find their way into every Army. In addition there were sides that were new and strange to these ground technicians of the Air Force. Tent-pitching, for example. Each man when he joined the outfit had been issued half a tent, called a shelter half, complete with pegs, pole and rope. With this he would team up with a fellow soldier and, together between their skills, if any, their instructions, and their luck, they would erect a livable tent. The Squadrons entered these events in a spirit of competition. Each competing against the other. The Squadron would line up in rows on the field, tent equipment before them on the ground and at a given signal up the tents would—or would not—shape. The 350th distinguished itself with proud glory in this event.

Lieutenant Welty, he of the moustache, was overjoyed. He took his handlebars over to the Post Exchange and bought a round of beers for some of the men he found there. Somehow it was the start of a beautiful evening. A few more men arrived and they had a beer or two. More men came in. More beer. Soon it got to be such a gathering that you couldn't buy the beer by the bottle anymore. You bought a case at a time. It started out about four in the afternoon. At nine that night the whole of the PX had been taken over by the 350th men. Each new arrival was greeted with a great cheer and forced to make a speech before he was included in the circle. The PX men watched the hordes arrive, winced and counted up the breakage as it occurred. Finally, when it came time to close up the joint, they supplied the men, against orders, with a few more cases of beer. These were hoisted on shoulders willing and able, and the whole bunch set out across the dusty flat field that separated the PX from the Squadron area. It was a great lengthy line that weaved and sang and made an unsteady, triumphant way cross the flat to the area. When they got there they broke up into little bunches, some going to the barracks to continue on, and a bunch to the latrine where sitting, pleased and satisfied on the familiar commodes, they listened to Johnny Riffle as he twanged his guitar. They sang lustily through the night. They liked to sing. All the old time things. Jim Carlton and Louis Fallmann and Leyboldt and Strain and Clarence Schroepfer and Victor Pacek and all the rest of them. It was a good night. They were all very proud of themselves.

Other items on the training program were the field stripping exercises wherein the Squadron was expected to strip down their guns and replace them under actual field conditions. Then, too, it was during this time that the Squadron for the first time had an opportunity to go to the firing range with their new light carbine rifles.



There they fired a number of rounds in the accepted Army manner; from a lying position, kneeling and standing positions. The men were fair shots. But they had a good time. Colonel Alkire liked guns too. He was out there a number of times, firing his small automatic pistol with the men.

The weeks rolled along and approached the finals in the whole series of exercises. There was a repetition of the show-down inspections held at the end of February in the Gym. Only this time not indoors but out on the ramp beside the planes where, on the concrete in the afternoon sunshine, the men spread their blankets and laid out their equipment all over again. The schedule was issued from Group Headquarters and called for each Squadron to undergo the show-down inspection at various times. One generally using the ramp in the morning and the other during the afternoon.

At this time the Air Echelon, who had by now returned completely and had been training on their own, were ordered on a maneuver cross-country flight. Led by Major Clevon, the Squadron joined the Group and flew to Hamilton Field, California. Once there they were joined by planes from all over the western states. With this great air arm they conducted themselves through a massive demonstration. Flying high over San Francisco the formation of B-17's and B-24's surrounded by fighter planes astounded the West Coast and the planes flew on out over the Golden Gate and conducted their maneuvers over the Pacific. It was an impressive show in those days but in reality it was the beginning of a series of unfortunate happenings for the Squadron's air personnel.

While at Hamilton one of the planes, in landing, ran off the edge of the runway and the impact of the tail assembly striking the ground was so hard that the tail gunner's compartment was snapped off and went spinning across the ramp. Inside, the gunner, Sgt. Charles E. Crippen, spun and bounced. When the assembly came to a final halt on the concrete, he climbed out none the worse for wear. But it could have been fatal.

Meanwhile back in Kearney the ground personnel went on about their show-down inspections. The Squadron arrayed itself one afternoon in its best field uniform and girded with straps and musette bags on backs, with rifles slung and with stuffed A bags on one shoulder, staggered off down the road in formation to the ramp. Out onto the ramp—it was a devilishly hot afternoon, too—they filed and took their pre-designated positions. Out went the blankets and down on their hands and knees went the ground echelon. They spread out their underwear and their extra shirts and pants and the odds and ends of their equipment. At secret places back in the barracks, under the mattresses and blankets were the "overages"—the extra pairs of shorts and shirts—the little things they weren't supposed to have, couldn't show out here and didn't want to part with. The little things they had been told to get rid of. But no one asked about the barracks cache. So they told no one. The Old Army Game.

The inspectors started up the long unending line of blankets and wearily checked their pads on the shorts and the overages. While they waited the men lay on the ramp in the hot sun and slept peacefully. The inspectors eyed the long line before them distastefully. And kept on at their business of making little notes in their books. The men waited.

After a little while as the afternoon wore on, the wind began to blow. Lightly at first, and then with the increasing vengeance of the Nebraska wind. As it grew in strength it swept across the unguarded ramp and caught the little white piles on the blankets, and the first thing the men knew their shorts and what else they had so carefully piled there were being scattered all over. Here and there a soldier would be running in hot pursuit of his underwear or towels. And the handkerchiefs—well, some of them must have reached Omaha that night! Added to that annoyance, every now and then a plane would taxi past and the prop wash would sweep down the line and catch everything, including the very blankets themselves and twist and

turn them into a wild jumbled mass. The men cursed. The inspectors cursed. The inspecting Lieutenant Colonel Dauncey and Major Standish held onto their hats and smiled and laughed. It was a lot of fun—and so instructive, too. Actual conditions. The men eyed the officers and cursed them along with the assorted winds, man-made or not.

So the week of inspections and competitions came to a close. They came to a close with a great show of military might when a grand and formal review was held. The Squadrons, now in their very sleekest Class A uniforms marched out onto the ramp for retreat one evening. It was late afternoon and an arrangement had been made for the playing of martial music over a loudspeaker system. It was to be a wonderful and inspiring show by troops ready for the fight overseas. The Colonel commanding the whole base was to be there in the reviewing line—and the ever-presence of Lieutenant Colonel Dauncey, Major Standish, and others. And so up the road came the Squadron again, this time looking like a group of Training School soldiers, shined and showered for their Saturday morning review. It was a hard afternoon's work and it was a colossal flop.

The next afternoon they tried it again. Anything was an improvement over the day before. And as the 350th came abreast of Major Standish and Colonel Dauncey with their eyes right, a throbbing sound came to their ears. Some of the men broke their attention and slanted their eyes obliquely towards the sky. There, coming up out of the southwest, was a great formation of planes. The Squadron's planes, and the Major's led all the rest. The men passed the line and were given the command to return as they were. They marched along beside the sitting planes and held their eyes now frankly up to the skies and the oncoming ships. The formation came low over the field sweeping low and then cutting around, coming in low over the Squadron area. The men marched along the road past the movie theatre, past the play field to the area, their eyes fixed on those planes. And the planes continued their wide circle and then dropped down behind the buildings to the south as they made for the runway to come in. By that time the unit had reached the front of the Orderly Room and had been dismissed. The Major arrived in his jeep from the line. And it was from his lips as he sat back at the First Sergeant's desk, legs idly crossed on the desk before him, hat atilt, that the Squadron heard the story of the performance of the West Coast maneuver by the air boys. The Major grinned ruefully. But he knew, and they knew, the situation was not a comedy any more. And after he had finished telling them about the trip, they were silent. It was their first introduction, the men of the ground, as to how much the success of their work depended on the work of the crews in the air. No matter how good or how bad they were on the ground—the success or failure of the air echelon was of equal importance to them. They played second fiddle to the air crews where success was tallied.

There was only a week left in April and that wasn't long. It was decided that the time was ripe for another party. This time the Major had an idea. When the Major had an idea it was usually okeh by everybody.

To the west of Kearney, out on the Lincoln highway for a mile or so, there is a lake called, picturesquely enough, Cotton Mill Lake. Since there is no cotton and no mill. There was a hunting lodge though, and several large barbecue pits. This was to be it. At noon on the day of the picnic all the work in the Squadron stopped, by the Major's orders. The men were gathered up in trucks and carried into Kearney to the city park first, where they played horseshoes, went horseback riding, watched the two big baseball games in hot contest. The officers proceeded to play the enlisted men and got trounced, to everyone's delight; the high spot of the game when the Major took over as catcher. He might have been an ace pilot in the making. He was a damned poor catcher. But everyone had a good time with him. They always did. Then the Armorers section played the Engineers and the Engineers, who always won, won.

As the afternoon wore on the trucks came by again and this time the men were taken on out to the lake where the cooks and KP's had amassed a terrific barbecue meal. The men gorged themselves on the slabs from the side of a beef which the adjutant had procured through methods that smelled of "Black Market", and filled themselves on beer, dispensed out of barrels from the back of GI trucks.

Boxing matches were held behind the lodge and were good—particularly the one between the two known to the men as "barrage balloons" for their plump forms, John Riffle and the most sports minded man in the unit, Ben Garber. Big, solid, swarthy Ben, who was always organizing a ball game or a boxing match day and night. The two of them fought like tigers. I haven't the slightest idea who won. The following bout demonstrated how even a Chaplain, Glen Teska, could get the stuffings knocked out of him. And be a good Joe about it, too. Major John Eagen and Major William Veal, commanding other Squadrons, and the Colonel were there, too. And Standish and Dauncey. The Major kidded a great deal—even drank a beer or two with the men. Whether or not he liked beer was beside the point. The men wanted him to drink with them. So he drank with them. One or two beers.

Hardly had the party passed than orders were received for the unit to move out of Kearney. They were closely guarded orders, now. Even the grape-vine had a little difficulty. The men were restricted to the base. The gates had clanged shut. Wives started packing their suitcases in town and moving out of the little one-room homes they had lived in for ninety days and they got on the train and went on back home—to California or New York or wherever home was. Went on back home to wait and wonder. The men tried not to show how they were feeling. Some of them felt pretty low.

Just about this time Colonel Robert Travis, heading an inspecting wing, came to visit the field and the Group on an inspection tour. He had a lovely airplane. All fitted up personal and nice inside and it was parked before one of the hangars next to the 350th section of the ramp.

Over on the 350th side one of the armorer men, Corporal Joseph Sobek, was cleaning the guns of one of the newly-returned ships, putting things to order. Suddenly the gun on which he was working fired. Several bursts escaped from the 350th area and tore across to Colonel Travis' pride and joy and imbedded themselves deep in the fuselage of the ship. It was amazing and awe-inspiring what three shots could do when placed just right! First, they shattered the plexi-glass nose of the ship. They drilled through one of the giant tires, causing the plane to list heavily to one side. And then they caused the crowning disaster. Inside the ship Travis, who was a fond and ardent fisherman, had hung his favorite fishing rod. This was shattered beyond belief.

Joe was sent to the barracks to await justice. Everyone was very agitated. Even Major Cleven could realize the full import of the catastrophe. Particularly when Travis was not the most gentle of men by repute. It wasn't so much the nose of the ship. That was replaceable. It wasn't so much the tire, either. You could replace that. The fuselage could be patched up as good as new and if necessary the whole damned ship could be rebuilt to taste. But that fishing rod! Joe walked through the area, alone, in a class by himself, sick and apprehensive. What did they do to people who smashed the Colonel's fishing rod? Only his closest friends could image the full terror of the situation and they lost no time in contemplating audibly for his benefit the full weight of reprisal that was about to hit him.

A great deal of conversation followed. The Colonel called the Major, and the Major called Lieutenant Varian and Lieutenant Varian called Sergeant Hays, the enlisted head of the offending department, who came into the office followed closely by Lieutenant McMahon whose brow was generally furrowed and more so this day. And finally the congress of iniquity called for Joe and he came in and the door shut. Those of us outside, supposedly working, listened through the good old



crack near the floor. Joe shouldn't have done it. Joe should be more careful. Joe shouldn't let it happen again. Joe swore fervently that it wouldn't. He came out. He was still a corporal. This was the age of modern miracles. The Colonel got into his repaired plane and flew away. Everyone knew the Major had fixed it up somehow. Who else could have done it?

There was an announcement made this week. Everyone, each man of the Group, was there to meet in the Gym. There had been an announcement, disbelieved by most men, that Colonel Alkire was to be replaced. Before the meeting was held, the announcement of a change in command was made. Colonel Alkire was replaced in command of the Group by Colonel Howard Turner, a man with an impressive achievement history in the Air Force. When the Squadrons assembled in the gym that morning in latter April they assembled for something they didn't want, something they didn't agree with, and something they very much didn't like. Saying good-bye to Colonel Alkire.

They stood around the gym, or sat on the floor or leaned up against the structure, some of them climbing on the piano in order to get a better view of the little clump of men that stood before the stage. The entire staff was standing there—Major Standish, Colonel Dauncey, and all the rest. And the smaller familiar figure of Colonel Alkire himself. Next to him was a rangy, tall man with heavy brows and a western sort of face. This must be the new Colonel. The men watched and waited. It was very quiet for so many men present. Colonel Alkire came forward and spoke. He began without formality or introduction in that old clipped, informal way of his. The men would remember him for that. When Alkire had something to say, he said it. Bluntly and to the point. This time was no exception.

"I am being replaced on charges of inefficiency and lack of discipline," he said. The men drew in their breaths sharply. It wasn't easy for him to say that. It wasn't easy for any man to come right out like that and say it. But he went on and said in a few words the things that the men already believed and knew to be the truth.

"My reputation in the future depends on what you as a Group do," he said, carefully. "I am ready to back that reputation with you." He turned to Colonel Turner and gave him his men whom he'd had from the beginning of their growth to this threshold of their maturity as a fighting unit.

Turner made a quiet entrance. He didn't say much, not too much nor too little. What he said was pretty much standard and expected. He did pay tribute to Alkire and then went on to outline the things he wanted to learn with the Group. He seemed to know there in the crowded gymnasium that he was fighting the high bank of popularity of the former leader. So he kept his remarks neutral and uncompromising. He said he would rely a great deal on his staff. Standish and Dauncey fidgeted in their corners and smiled in a deprecating manner.

Two days after the meeting the air echelon was ordered to Wendover again, for a refresher course, and, when they took off, the ground echelon was not to see them again until they were reunited somewhere overseas. The morning they left was clear and cold. And not without its usual mishap. This time it was a "freak".

A plane piloted by Lieutenant DeSanders of Texas came taxiing down the runway towards the take-off point. At the extreme edge of the field stood a jeep. For some reason as the plane neared the jeep it turned suddenly from the taxi line and headed almost directly for the car. The plane veered sharply, swinging the tail around in a sweeping motion, catching the jeep under the stabilizer and tipping it over easily. But the damage was not so much to the jeep as to the plane. For the metal frame of the little vehicle ripped through the stabilizer and gouged out several large holes. The plane stopped, the rear door opened, and the crew piled out and stared anxiously at their damaged ship.

The ship following stopped also, and from the midsection the Major came striding across the ramp. He took one look at the damage, sent the offending pilot

off to his own ship, asked for some masking tape and stripped the stabilizer holes with the tape. He then climbed into the plane and went off down the runway without further ado. By the time the plane reached Wendover the wind had ripped away all the tape and the holes were larger and gaping. But the Major landed safely and without comment.

And so the air echelon split away from the ground again. The engineers and the operations men found other work that needed doing. Always resourceful and always with an eye to the future, they lacked some engineering equipment in the Squadron which they thought would be of use overseas. So they sidled around the base depot unit and under cover swiped a number of pieces of good stuff. They managed to smuggle out a complete drill press and lots of other odds and ends. It was all in the family, they figured.

The clerks and the supply men found themselves deluged under a mountain of paper work. There were supplies to issue, and loading, packing, shipping and charting to do. The staffs of the clerical departments worked most all night as well as all day in order to see that the thing was done. The Orderly Room went crazy trying to make up large flowing rosters with all sorts of classifications and duties on them, accounting for every member of the organization. Then, too, the loading roster for the ship had to be done, so that when the men arrived at the pier they would march directly onto the boat without pause or congestion. The Army tries to think far in advance in some things. Supply found themselves saddled with the job of painting the mysterious new shipping numbers—5280-C—on the boxes and crates that would be used for shipment. The First Sergeant swore and cussed and raced around and worked like a trojan. Everyone did. New men were transferred in at the last moment and had to be included in all the rosters and given jobs to do. Lieutenant James Bowers for Intelligence was one. Private Francis J. Hartnett was another. Hartnett, small, stocky, red-haired Irishman, came into the orderly room one morning just before lunch. Things were in the usual decline. He was told to stand aside in the corner for a while. He stood there, complete with helmet and rifle and all equipment far into the afternoon. Not at all happy. Completely forgotten. And was bawled out loudly and harshly when he was discovered. They were trying days.

On the 2nd of May the Squadron lined up before the Orderly Room, answered the roll call and then marched down the dusty road to the tracks where the train sat waiting. They climbed aboard and took their places while the old business of walking from one end of the train to the other counting heads to be sure the number of passengers tallied with the roll went on all over again. It still didn't tally. But everyone seemed to be present. Shortly after five o'clock in the afternoon the train pulled out and moved down the spur track and after much bumping and groaning it fitted itself to the main line tracks. The Squadron was on the move again. Everyone felt much better and a little more alive and excited. And very tired. It was late that night when they went through Omaha. The next morning found them moving right along through Iowa.

## X

So the ground echelon came to Camp Williams in a little town known as Camp Douglass in the wooded hills of central Wisconsin. An odd place for an Air Force outfit. But this was the ground echelon.

The Squadron arrived at night. No one knows why but the Army always fixed it so that you arrive at night. You arrive at night and everyone is supposed to find his way about to new quarters in the dark. Maybe it's part of a training formula. But, whatever it is, it is inevitable.

So we arrived at Camp Williams at night. The Squadron marched from the train down through the dark woods to the building that was to serve as an Orderly Room. There they were assigned to tents. Tents? Yes, tents. Here in the northern woods it was to be tents. The kind of a tent that sleeps about six men comfortably,



with a little cast iron stove in the center of the floor space. A canvas house with<sup>ly</sup> cement flooring. At first glance most of the men rolled their eyes heavenwards and complaints were uniform and vociferous. They couldn't stand the cold. They'd all have pneumonia within the week and all the other respiratory diseases rolled into one. It was mass murder, they knew it; the Army was an organization run on the basic lines of Murder, Incorporated. They got to bed that night very disgruntled.

The tents were not the only cause for complaint the first night at Camp Williams. The barracks bags were brought up from the train and dumped in an unordered mass in the space between the kitchen and the Orderly Room and the men stumbled around the dark and tried to read the stenciled names on the sides of the bulky bags. In addition to all this, it started to rain. Everyone hated Wisconsin on sight.

The next morning they explored around and found to the west over the brim of the hill behind the tents that there was a great green field where they would drill and have their calisthenics and up towards the shaggy crag that towered at the north end of the camp there was a firing range where they would fire their guns again. Beyond the grassy valley to the west still farther there had been set up exhibition camouflages and things they'd never seen before. So the time set aside for Camp Williams looked like a busy one. It turned out to be all of that.

In order to cope with loading problems and other shipping disorders as well as to keep the men in some sort of countable order, a series of flights had been formed out of the echelon's total. Four of them and they were headed by four top-ranking enlisted men, and four officers. Heading the flights were all master sergeants now, Leypoldt, Riffle, Pacek and the morose youngster, Steve Kane. Thus when the organization came to Williams it bore for the first time a unity and a cohesion that it had not possessed until the latter days at Kearney.

The Squadron was at Camp Williams just one week. Though when you look back over the time spent there now it seems a lot longer. The days were scheduled with drilling, calisthenics, trips to the firing range—and here they had a chance to really shoot for the record that would be entered on their Form 20's because before the unit left here each man had to qualify. Every man did. Though for some hapless individuals it took a lot of trips to the firing range.

There were trips to the camouflage area, too, and lectures and training. The week was full of these things. No longer was the next stop just another base. The next stop was the jumping off place. And so they paid particular attention. And learned.

At nights the personnel was free to come and go. Indeed, the fact that there were no passes to cope with (there were no fences around the camp so why passes?) and that one could come and go from the post with absolute freedom was a distinct novelty, although the men never walked out of the camp without a sort of guilt gnawing at their consciences.

So the boys went and had their usual good time. They had the bars of Camp Douglass to play in. But little else. But to the south there was Tomah where they could dance and do most anything. They did. And in the other direction there was Mauston or even Baribou. Some of the lucky ones like Lieutenant Caverly and Ben Garber lived within traveling distance and had an opportunity to go home and see the folks. But the week flew by, the bags were finally packed again, the training was completed, the tent sides were rolled up, the area policed for papers and cigarette butts, and the Squadron was lined off for the march down the road to the station again. This time not even the grape-vine had the slightest idea where we were headed.

Another long parade of states. The train pulled out of Camp Williams and made its way down the eastern coast of Wisconsin, down through Milwaukee and Madison into Chicago and then across into Ohio. The men sat in their seats

offid stared out into a rainy, dismal Cincinnati and then they were rushed on into Pennsylvania. Two days after they had left Camp Williams in the rain they came into New Jersey, still in the rain.

They had been travelling, in good accommodation, steadily and furiously all the way, as though the engineer of the train were aware of the responsibility that was his and wanted to shake himself free of it as soon as possible. The call had come through that there was an expected arrival at three in the morning. Naturally. They would be called. So they slept fitfully and some of them didn't sleep at all. Finally at three they were roused and dressed and trussed themselves in the uncomfortable field uniform again and sat in their seats, packs strapped to their backs, hunched over their rifles, staring out of the windows into the impenetrable darkness.

The train began to slacken its speed and suddenly it ground to a stop. The men peered out of the windows, but aside from a few lights here and there and a reflection of those same lights in the wet of a recently-showered street there was nothing to see. They heard commands and they moved out of the train down into the night and smelled the sea air. This, then, was Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. This was that mysterious, frightening, compelling place—the port of embarkation.

## XI

So they arrived at Camp Kilmer at three in the morning of the fifteenth of May, 1943. This was their last station before the ocean crossing. All of them were conscious of it when they stepped from the train to the damp pavement of New Jersey.

Down the platform they filed, their guns whacking them in the rear as they swung with their gait. Now and then a man in the ranks would grunt as his already weighing pack would slip and the straps over his shoulder would bite into the uncompromising flesh. At the far end of the platform all their desired efficiency went for a word. Someone along the line shouted the wrong direction for the column to turn. Right instead of left. Half of them turned silently, shufflingly, and followed the lieutenant leading them, the others followed the command and struck off down the railroad ties themselves, nimbly and not-so-nimbly picking their way along in an effort not to stumble over the rails. Confusion reigned and chaos. The rout was complete. They scrambled back to the road and reassembled. Everyone was silent and grim. Here and there a man dared to grin to himself in the darkness. The good old 350th was on the ball. Things were no different at Kilmer than they had been anywhere else along the line.

The long silent line made its way past the wire fence that encircled the field. They marched silently down the streets, their feet scuffling in the night and came to the area that was to be theirs for the duration of their stay. They halted wearily, standing very quietly, waiting for their barracks assignments. These were given hurriedly and the men located their beds. Then they went out and waited on the sidewalks while the trucks shuttled back and forth from the train to the area bringing the bags. And the old search went on all over again for the two bags. The A bag and the B bag with their names and serial numbers stencilled on them. Somehow you always managed to find the A bag *or* the B bag. You never found both of them at once. But gradually by a process of elimination the great pile of bags diminished and the men hoisted them to their shoulders, went into the double-storied barracks and made up their beds and went to sleep.

There were some men who did not make up their beds and go to sleep. The Orderly Room, for example, and the supply departments. These were the two departments who would work while they stayed at Kilmer. All the other departments were not functioning. But the Orderly Room must always set itself in operation immediately the Squadron settles down. And the Supply room. The two departments went house-hunting while the Squadron slept.

The supply room found itself a rather spacious section of building. The Orderly Room moved joyfully into two rooms only to find that this was the spot earmarked for Group Headquarters and so they moved out again. They went to the other end of the building. Here they found themselves allotted a little cubby-hole of a room, next to a larger and more spacious room into which the 349th had already claimed squatters rights. So a little cramped, we moved in, opened up the portable typewriter and hung out the "open for business" sign.

After a few hours had passed, the general picture of the place Camp Kilmer came to light. Actually Kilmer was not the port of embarkation. There is a frequent misconception of the term "port of embarkation" in the average mind, with many of the men in the Army stating their last station in the United States as being the port of embarkation. Instead, Kilmer was the staging area. Here the troops went through a final check-up, mental, physical, and equipment. It was here that the last overages were weeded out of the organization and the last replacements were added to the already set loading roster. It was here that the final records were checked. It was from here that the troops would go directly to the port—that port of embarkation—on secret orders to board the ship. This was indeed the last stand. This was the staging area.

Kilmer naturally had no air echelon present and that meant that, aside from the Orderly Room staff and the Supply department, no one had any work to do. They were the lucky ones. True, they were routed out of bed every morning at six and lined up for a roll call, but, more often than not, the majority of them went right back to bed and spent the morning there. They slept and grew sleek and fat while the Orderly Room and Supply toiled and sweated over unbelievably long, unending lists and required check sheets. The morning report and the sick book, as always, went on and on.

During the first few days at Kilmer the Squadron was to undergo a general inspection by the inspecting officers of the base. These were officers and staffs maintained at the staging area for the purpose of checking thoroughly all equipment and the men themselves for completeness before they left the base. Everything must be complete and ready when the unit was alerted for the overseas movement. The men worried as the Orderly Room issued orders and schedules for the coming inspections. There was a time set for the last show-down of clothing and equipment. There was another for a general medical inspection. There was still another time set for the closing of all rosters and all forms that littered the Orderly Room desks and benches. It was a hectic time for everyone concerned. Except the men themselves who had nothing to do but just sit and wait to be examined. They knew that once all this inspection business was over and done with they would be released on pass and they had their eye on New York City, eighteen miles away.

The first inspection to come was the clothing inspection and at a given time the men laid their equipment out on the usual folded blanket. It covered the tops of the beds and spilled over onto the floor. The little horde of inspecting officers and noncommissioned officers came booming into each barracks. Took a fleeting glance at all the equipment and fled to the next barracks. The men looked at each other. This was the final clothing check they had heard so much about. They thought of the comfortable civilian shoes they had sent home and all the other little personal items that all the regulations said they couldn't take overseas. They watched the inspecting officers fly by and mourned for their old trusty oxfords. But it was too late.

Then came the medical. This was a honey. The medical officers parked themselves down at the far end of a barracks and the men stripped and came mincing past the little lump of medics. It came up to the old standard of "if your body is warm, you're in." Everyone was in. This was done.

And so the inspections went on and finally came to an end. The Supply



department made replacements and issued gas impregnated clothing to be worn in case of an attack. Sticky, stiff OD trousers and other articles of clothing that smelled to high heaven and gave their aroma to everything else in the barracks bag. But orders is orders.

Gradually the work that was most important to Camp Kilmer was brought to a close. The Squadron was okehed for clearance. That meant there was nothing further to do but wait until the day we were alerted.

During those first days, in between the inspections and the sleeping, the men wandered around the base and located the important facilities. Important facilities to men were (1) the Western Union office where they wired home for money, (2) the movie theatre where they went every night they could—seemed like everybody went to see Jean Arthur in "The More the Merrier", and (3) the Service Club which lay across the field behind the Squadron area. It was a most wonderful Service Club, for in those days you could telephone home with the able assistance of telephone operators who were either sweet if you were connected within two hours or devils if they failed to connect you at all. It was no uncommon sight to see the members from the far west sitting out a telephone call for some five or six hours. But the three minutes at the end of those long hours was worth it. Men came from the telephone booths flushed and grinning. Or maybe sober with little dark shadows in their eyes.

The Service Club was not only a telephone exchange. It also fed most of the Squadron during its stay in Kilmer. The food at the mess hall at Kilmer was uniformly bad, the worst of any station to which Squadron had been. It was odd, too, since they had access to every type of fresh and canned food there. They had all the facilities for modern cookery. But the food was poor. It was a big mess hall, one that was admirably clean. But looks were not filling. So the men, after the first meal or so, stayed away from the mess hall in droves. Instead, they filled the Service Club with great long lines and ate good food, well prepared—at their own expense.

Censorship made its entrance during the time at Kilmer. Letters were censored before they left the post and some of the men tried the experiment of mailing their letters from New York instead of running them through the censorship on the base. Telephone calls were made under the warning that a censor was listening and they knew when they made their calls that they could not mention the fact that they were at Camp Kilmer nor could they discuss any part of their life there. All they could talk about was themselves and mention the fact and the times that they had been in Manhattan. It was funny and curious. You were not allowed to tell where you were. And yet when the operator called the party at home on a collect call—and they were mostly collect—she always said it was "New Brunswick, New Jersey, calling". The wife or the mother or whoever it was on the other end would be startled and say "you're in New Jersey" and the soldier would stammer and try to tell her that he couldn't say where he was.

Immediately after the restriction had been lifted, when the inspections were all done, the men were allowed to leave the base. Fifty percent one night and the other half the next night. This was to continue until such time as the Squadron was alerted for embarkation. The night the restriction was lifted the men raced pell mell to the little station on the railroad line and caught the five-twenty into New York City.

Most of the men had never been to New York at all. They were men from the middle west and from California and Texas, and from the northern countries and they had spent all their lives reading about New York and watching movies about New York and hearing and reading about New York. And so it is only natural that they would race for the five-twenty and strain their eyeballs trying to see around the corners of the train for their first glimpses of the city. And after they

had come up out of Pennsylvania Station into the late afternoon sunshine of 33rd Street, the first place they headed for was the place where they felt the heart of New York to be, the place they heard of most, the place they'd seen pictured most of all, Times Square.

As they got acquainted with the city that first night and the nights that followed they hit most of the high spots. They all went to see Gypsy Rose Lee in Star and Garter, and some of them saw Oklahoma. Some of them went to Madison Square Garden regardless of what the attraction was, just because all their lives they'd heard stories and broadcasts from the Garden and they wanted to see what it looked like. They walked through Central Park. Some of them wound up in Jack Dempsey's, or at Radio City or across the street in the Music Hall. Or down in the Village or over on the east side or up in the Bronx or out on Long Island. Most of them went strong all through the night and came limping in in time for the roll call at six in the morning. They'd stand the roll call and then, having nothing else to do, they'd go off to the barracks with their souvenirs to sleep most of the day, to write letters home telling what they had seen and done and remembered. So the days sped along.

## XII

The 350th sat, ready and waiting, at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, for the word that would close the gates, lock out the world, and open the sea lane to their next destination. A phase was coming to an end. The business of playing at being soldiers was nearly over. The soldiering was about to be the order of the day.

The Squadron was now almost seven months old, seven long months had elapsed from the time that the little band of officers and enlisted men had set out from Boise, Idaho, on the long route of training. In that time, almost daily, new men were added to the Squadron roster until now they sat in the Jersey marshes up to strength, each man trained in his own duties, each man trained to work in the pattern of the whole, each man ready for action.

There were all kinds of men, all ages, all manner of men. They were the typical Army of the day. Lawyers, mechanics, clerks, students, the men who owned and ran the little businesses of America, the town druggist, the grocery man, the undertaker. They were the sons and husbands, lovers and fathers of America—from California, Texas, Ohio, South Carolina, Maine, from the west and the east, the north and the south. They were the dull ones, the bright ones, the happy ones, the sad ones. They were a family. In the months that had passed they had come to know each other. Protestant, Catholic, Jew, and the ones who were just coasting to Heaven without a belief. They'd come to know beliefs, prejudices, accents, and the good and the bad of each other; they'd worked together, played together, talked, lived, slept, drunk, and listened together. As the months had passed they had unconsciously pooled all these things together in a sort of collective mind. They had begun to think and act together as a unit of living and being as well as working. The demands, the wants, the thoughts of the man sleeping next to them became integrally a part of their daily life. Their lives before the Squadron became a sort of detached thing, something that had been somewhere before. They were the 350th Squadron now, the enlisted men in the Regular Army, the Selective Service men, the Reserve, all of them together, became the Squadron as their own identities became merged and anonymous. And, because of this, they were ready and willing for the next step to come. They were ready to go into it together, not as individuals, but putting forth a solid, understanding front.

There were nine master sergeants in the unit now, counting the First Sergeant among them. Eight were Regular Army men: Kirn, Dempsey, Everett, Kane, McDonough, Pacek, Richardson, and Riffle. The ninth, Leypoldt, was a Selective Service man. The other masters had flown with the air echelon, Strain, Jackson, McMillion.



As you looked around the Squadron you saw them all as you had come to know them. Balding Henry Fox, perennially worried and preoccupied, Chandler Lynch, wavy-haired, tall, Southerner, with charm and success with the ladies, the artist Schroepfer who was a crew chief in the Army, lanky Tom Whitmire, and short, talkative Claude Bush. There were the quiet reserved ones: Robert Champion and George Chrzanowski and laughing Ernest Clarke, who was always looking something like a good-natured rabbit. Clean-cut, serious Lester Darneille, and shy, raw-boned Reginald Dietzel. Or roly-poly A. C. Hostetler, or pious, older Joseph Krystof from the north woods. There'd be good-looking, studious Robert W. Lester of the armorers, or Jay Q. Mill with the man who was his friend and looked his twin, William Gano. There was short-haired, funny Glenn Myers from Florida, or shy, blushing David L. Presley. There were the Secords, Reynolds, Vickers, Wileys and the Bryants, too. Or the older men like Lee Cropp, married and not so keen to leave all that behind. There were the friendships, like that of Roy Dorman and Joseph Panczak, constant and inseparable. There were old, experienced soldiers like James Fitch who brought with them stories of how it used to be in the old army and who were referred to as "old army men" and were respected for it. There was the little funny guy, Arlo Hilberg, whom everyone knew as "Snuffy Smith" so constantly that the time came when you'd have to stop and think what his real name was. Men like the little Mexican clerk, Fausto Ramirez, that everyone called "Pancho" as he strutted importantly around the area. I imagine there are men who, reading here, will find out for the first time his name was not Pancho, but Fausto. Even he began to believe in Pancho.

So it went. Hardworking, devoted men like Herb Lake, J. B. Linduff, Rudolph Martin with all the muscles. Bruno Mathien with a thick Austrian accent, and Joseph Mattia, sleek-haired, smooth. Bill Muller with the sliding laugh and Earl Neville with his rich, thick Carolinian drawl. Bill Newton, bald and big, and Jacob Nyfeler, good-humored and witty. James O'Brien and the quiet, good-looking Scandanavian kid from the middle west, Orville Olson.

Wasn't this America? Alex Sokolosky, quick-tempered and hard-working, Dennis Polver, short, dark and older than most, a civilian welder turned miraculously into a mail man by the Army's stroke. Jack Spence, former lawyer; Lewis Strohkirch, former landowner; Joseph Uhring, Abel Tiquet, Ben Steenwyk, Virgil Smith, all the Smiths, Charles, and Norman known as "Crusher", and little Jack. Hartnett the Irishman, Goldstein, Frudakis, Dell'Aquila, McCollister, Rozier, Hoffman, Barbosa, Rinaldi, Dedobbeleer, Dombroski, Muszynski, Perry and Matyasovski —there was America. From everywhere, from all strains, that was America.

There were the brothers, George Gouin, squat, strong, older, and the kid brother, Richard Gouin, taller, stronger, and kid-like. There were buddies, Harold Milway and Hoy Mitchell. There were people who knew everyone—Willis Douglass, James Griffith, James Lively, Joseph P. J. Davin. There were quiet types who were there all the time but remained silent and steady — Milburn Surdez, Charles Alexander, William Verser, George Raschke, George Price, Charles Holmes, Fred Muschell.

There were the Campbells, Donald G. and William C., no relation, yet good friends and always together. There was little Frank Bouchy who never said anything and Charles Banks who never was quiet. There were the men who lived to play ball, Milton Martinson and Franklin Stifter, and the men who played with them, Robert Pullar, Ben Garber, Edward Fawcett, and Cecil Owenby.

There was most rotund Wayne Ketchum, and slender Leo Don Walton; gabbling James Dunn, and silent Orville Matthews; hard-working Jimmie Whitmire of the kitchen, and skilled, undisciplined Stanley Napiorkowski. There was erudite Frank Quilici and the carpenter genius of Kenneth Retz; the youth of Alfred Ackerman and Leon Cole paired with the impenetrability of ageless Theodore

Buchanan and Aubra Williamson. There was John Ballasch who had lost his mother in Kearney, and John Eggleston who was to gain a wife in England. There was Manhattan in Isidore I. Gootnick and a rock-like maturity in Amos Hill. There was the tang of the everglades in the roughness of Matthew Merritt, and the smooth courtesy in former steward Ralph Carmona. There was the smiling willingness of Pedro Garza, and the taciturn, unknown quantity of Diego Hernandez. There were the calm, placid concern of John Chapman and Henry Clayburn, and the understanding of tennis pro George Menefee and farmer Clarence Steubing. There was nervous worry in John Bindas and the family man, Chester Brown, who had a wife and five children. There was nervous, fine-grained Leonard Ball, and sensitive, gentle Graydon Tirey. As against the lusty, firmness of Gordys Diers and Homer Parker. There was Wayne Scott, whose hands shook forever, and John Thomson, tweedy and English. Curly-haired, soft-eyed James Walden and no hair at all twenty-year-old Robert Wiese. There was a hot-tempered boy from the hills, Ray Daniels, and the unmoving Ralph Reed from the farms of the middle west. There was Robert McRae who never found his right place, and Thomas Scaper, Indian, who never found his. And there was Charles Geisinger and Thomas Nantz and Pasquale Odoardi and Alexander Dunn and Luther Tisdale who all found theirs. There was older Robert Brindle, cocky and sarcastic who attracted younger, star-eyed Thomas Zoeller and who gave so much of his qualities to the younger man that they finally came to act and think and talk alike. There was Michael Glowiak who gave to the Army the same sincerity he would have given to civilian life, and Lawrence Keehn and Max Kushner who did the same. There was James Nichols with his foot trouble, and Clifford R. Starkey with his. There was Michael Gabor, surly until you knew him well, and Ellwood Frum, gentle and kind from the start. There was the student and clever writer Thomas Horak, and the newspaperman Bernard Leo. There was Willard Mabry, Robert Myers and Frank Perry who laughed a lot, and Donald Hermann who carried a warm and friendly heart. There was hard to know Clayton Derleth, and easy to know Sylvester Trojanowski; reserved John Van Beek, and marked for the future Roy Webb. There was Joseph Chandler in Ordnance and Pat Chandler in the Orderly Room, but only one short, talkative Budd Wallize. There was former minister Jacob Skaggs, bushy browed, older, not so sure of himself in this new life.

There was Leonard Schlossberg, young, not so sure of himself either, and his pal, Marvin J. Wolfman, who with Schlossberg found New York and home too close and went through the jagged hole in the fence for an extra night at home. Tall, aggressive Roger Sortevik, and short, good-humored Riley Bench from Arkansas. Thin-featured Leodore Hamelin and chameleon-featured Roger Lyons. There was the kid with the puppy-dog quality, Joe McElroy, and the distant Howard Simpson. There was the smiling Mexican Melecio Garcia, and his tiny, artist-musician pal, Faran Chapa. There was William Copple, worried and unwilling to go away from his home, and raw, untrained George Monroe, who didn't much care. There were the people who worked in the kitchen such long hours, Robert Walker and Ivan Jackson and Warren Harris and Ambus Morris and the men who drove the trucks and jeeps, Ray Matz and Ira Ryman. Oscar Legg, Otto Alley and big, laughable Alvin Gabrick.

There were others that made up the Squadron and the family. There were the officers of the ground echelon, too. Lieutenant Varian who, as adjutant, was charged with the responsibility of shepherding the ground men across the Atlantic. He had grown in his job. He was ready to lead them. There was Franklin Seibert, ex-school teacher and school teacher in mannerism and temperament still. There was Captain Marvin Bowman, ex-newspaper editor and humorous and quick-witted. And his assistants Lieutenant James Bowers, light-humored, intelligent, quick. A refugee from Washington, D. C. there was Lieutenant Irving Juster, quiet, moody, legal, who wanted something better than the Squadron could offer.

There was red-haired likeable Kenneth Welty, who wanted to fly and couldn't yet, and Lieutenant Robert Tienken going mad in the Supply Room. There was Albert Paul, heavy, dark, dynamic, and deal-making. He was helping Tienken go mad. There was short, reserved Donald Blazer, the engineering officer, and dry, colorless William Cook who was an amateur photographer. There was small, slight Malcolm Clouter, cackling, nervous, excitable, who went off half-cocked before he understood the whole of the picture. There was tall, good-looking Richard Nordrum, quiet, determined, studious. And Timothy McMahon, tall, easy-going, rangy, sports-minded. He didn't worry much. As against John Caverly, slender, nervous, high-strung, who dramatized all events and worried over all of them. But he was excited and anxious to get into action. This was his moment. And, finally, John Hardy, Squadron Surgeon, quiet, easy, sincere. He was doing a job that had to be done.

This was the 350th Squadron at Camp Kilmer. The air echelon was off in Wendover, getting ready to fly the ocean. But they were the same kind of people. They'd just learned another job. They were other people's children, husbands and brothers. They belonged to the people who were being left behind. From one end of the country to the other. And though they were loved as they loved, remembered as they remembered, they were set aside and being set aside in the minds of the men who were leaving. Set up on a little shelf in the mind to be kept safe until the men came back someday.

### XIII

Some of the men were lucky. Like the men who had had families living near Camp Williams. For they went home on their passes. Frank Linderoth went to Red Bank, New Jersey, while Al Fein and Isidore Gootnick went home to Brooklyn and the Bronx. James Fitch went to his mother in Philadelphia and Captain Hardy joined his wife in Jersey. Angelo Frudakis went back to Manhattan, Nick Dell Aquila home to Hoboken. Lieutenant Clouter flew to his wife in Massachusetts, and Lieutenant Varian's folks came up from Baltimore. While the rambling characters within the unattached Squadron rambled far and wide. Sergeant Creighton led the parade in getting to Washington and back in his twelve hours. And the rest of the men alternated according to their dictates of mind and purse, New York, Philadelphia, Newark, or the little club right off the post. Roll call was the only thing that mattered and that wasn't until six in the morning. Time enough to worry as the sun started to edge up to New Jersey.

During this time some last minute additions came to the Squadron. Men like George Smith, "Junior", who, at the tender age of sixteen, had two years' service in the Army already. Men like Leroy Wolf, Riley Bench, Oscar Gorbet, Charles Haggerty, Henry Clayburn, Clay McComb, Henry Young, Julius Carlson. These were accepted and fed into the departments that needed those last few men to build them up to full strength. Two men fell ill before the outfit finally left and when it did they had to be left behind. Louis Fallman, engineer, went to the hospital and stayed. Gordys Diers got "lost" one night and it was nearly a week before he got back. But he did get back, and Arthur Piunti, another engineer—to whom things seemed always to be happening—came back to the unit from Wisconsin where he had been left in hospital.

What seemed like a long, long time in New Jersey—and yet was only a couple of weeks—finally came to an end. With its coming went the peace and security, the long parade of show-downs, short arms, and all the long weary months of travelling and training, all that had been pointed directly to this particular hour. It was as if we had cast away the hawsers from our own personal ship and, with the receipt of our orders, we set sail in more ways than one. We shoved off from the wharves of our old lives and slipped out into the stream of new living. Behind us were all the things we knew. With us were the things we had learned and become accustomed



to. And out there somewhere were the things we had to do and the life we faced together. In the hours that came up now and sat with us we realized just how close we were to each other. For there might be millions upon millions of people fighting across the face of the world. But there were only a few hundred of us on this particular order when it came. We made ready to leave the United States, and this was our own, personal moment. The whole war had come to us, a few hundred together. The only thing we were sure of now was the good nearness of the man in the next bunk and the steady, comforting pulse of his breathing in the thinking night. Somehow, with him there, the uncharted course ahead didn't seem impossible. Just long and unknown.

#### XIV

On the morning of May 26, 1943, a particularly rainy, nasty morning with an added hint of heat, the Squadron fell out in the area, fully equipped. The A bags had been sent on to the train and the B bags had been consigned a day previously to the ship. We wouldn't see the B bags until we got across. In fact, the Army's shipping department confessed somewhat bitterly that we might never see them again.

We had enough equipment to fight any war. We had our wool uniforms on. Over that, our wool overcoats. Slung from left to right was the gas mask—in those days the old-fashioned one, big, unyielding, unwieldy. From the left shoulder the carbine, which was just long enough to poke the legs with the barrel end, just heavy enough to slide down a rounded shoulder. On our back we had the musette bag, crammed with toilet articles, towels, underwear, hankies, books, magazines, candy, cigarettes, gum, playing cards, letter paper, stamps (useless), and whatever the personal choice for a voyage which might last three weeks! This was tied to us, the straps running over each shoulder, tight across the chest. They latched onto the pistol belt which, in addition to holding a pouch with two clips for the carbine, held a first-aid packet and a canteen, filled with fresh water. This item dangled from the right thigh, bouncing against the right leg in cadence with the jabbing of the carbine against the left. Around the pack on the back, in horseshoe fashion, lashed on with tent rope, rode the bulky roll created with two large wool blankets. On our heads we wore wool knitted caps and the heavy steel helmets with paper liner, the whole effect buckled under the chin by a strap which had been thoughtfully (?) reinforced with steel edging. To complete the effect we also wore laced canvas leggings. The 350th was ready for action! Thank heaven, they had sent that A bag on ahead!

We shuffled down through the sticky dampness to the waiting train and, after the usual delays here and there, the Squadron climbed aboard and sat back, easing the shoulder straps. Thus the 350th left Kilmer for the port of embarkation.

It took two hours for the slow-moving train to reach the Hoboken ferry. Then out to the platform the Squadron clambered. The weather was now quite warm and by the time the men got out into the heat, lashed themselves together, and this time, grabbed, in addition, those weighted A bags, the perspiration came freely. They lined up and moved down off the station platform to the ferry, where, crammed on the automobile deck and out on the apron, they edged themselves gingerly down on their bulky bags and waited. Some wore their helmets tilted backwards, letting what air there was seep inside. Some slipped their packs down towards the small of their backs. Some sat with their fingers wedged under the straps that had begun to burn, cutting into their necks and shoulder muscles. Some just sat leaning forward, gripping the carbine like the stock of a baseball bat. Any position was welcome that would afford a little relief from the general pain and discomfort of the situation.

The boat plowed up the river. Past 42nd Street until finally it came abreast of the capsized Normandie, lying on her side in the trough of Pier 48. The men came to life for a moment as they passed her. Some stood on tip toe to try and catch a glimpse. Others were just too tired, too disgruntled. The clumsy ferry warped across the river and headed for Pier 50. There, in silent, deserted grandeur,

stood the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth, two great hulks thrusting upwards. The Squadron sat very still and watched the scene rimmed through the frame of the ferry's bow with interest. It was to be the Queen Elizabeth, they knew that now. They were proud and pleased that it was to be something important and not some insignificant little freight boat. This was the big time, the Queen Elizabeth.

The ferry snuffled into the pier and the men, still in the unending lines of threes, gathered themselves together with grunts and puffs, hunching the packs up, trying to make fast the carbine, getting the gas mask in the right spot so it wouldn't whack the canteen, making room on the right shoulder for that colossus that was the A bag.

There was a bustling, groaning strain as they hefted the load and the perspiration started all over again. Some of them found they couldn't get the bag to their shoulder and so they left the boat with them clasped to their stomachs, the veins in their straining necks standing out like angry bull cords. Others, compromised, dragging them along, under the feet of the men behind them. The line moved on to the pier with a jerky, unsteady movement.

The long file entered the huge, cavernous pier and climbed up interminable stairs to the upper levels. Finally they came to a halt. They could see the open maw in the side of the big ship. They were pretty close now. They took a deep breath and stood there waiting for the word to board her.

The Queen Elizabeth towered alongside the pier. There was so much of her that all you could see were her slate grey sides. There was a lot of confusion and a lot of smells. To some they were new and exciting and big. To others the musty creosote smell, the stale salty weight of the air, was a welcome familiar friend after the earthiness of Nebraska. But to all of them the Queen Elizabeth was a new and compelling experience. They waited, hot, sweaty, their hands full. Their waiting was complicated by Red Cross girls who passed among them offering them nice hot, steaming cups of coffee when all they wanted so devoutly was a glass of cold water!

Suddenly the cue is given. The lines begin to move. In a merging single file they pass quickly by a long table set at the head of the gangplank at which the First Sergeant, flushed of face and annoyed, aided by two or three clerks, calls out the last name of each man. As his last name is sounded, the man struggling past responds with his own first name and middle initial and is checked off the loading roster. Now and then a tired soldier staggers past the table, not having heard the required rules. Such omission brings a tirade of abuse from the First Sergeant and the man, stunned momentarily by all this, halts, shrugs, turns and slowly shuffles across the gangplank, across the giant chasm between the ship and the pier, on into the bowels of the grey hulk. In just a few minutes in the life of the whole day, the 350th has passed from pier to boat and some other unit has started to board.

On board confusion is rampant. Fifty percent of the Squadron finds that they are to sleep the first night in cabins on the "A" deck. The others have been allotted space on the Promenade deck. That is the arrangement for the crossing. Those who sleep downstairs tonight will exchange places with those on deck for tomorrow night. Possession from eleven in the morning to eleven the next morning, alternating each day until the trip is over. The men assigned to the cabins go downstairs and dump their equipment in the cabins and along the corridors. Everywhere there is equipment. Men step over and on A bags, trip over rifles, stagger over blanket rolls. Some men gaze into the crowded cabins and wince. They don't look too comfortable.

With from six to eighteen men sharing a room that had been built to accommodate two or three in other times, things are definitely crowded. There is just enough room to squeeze into the cabin, past the three tiered bunks to the one you have snatched for yourself. You get in by edging yourself sideways, finishing the



process with a giant thrust that lands you in the middle of the sagging bunk. You lie there and stare up at the downward curve that is the body of the man above you. You look at the ropes of your own cot. It's a canvas center strapped to the metal frame of the bed by interlaced ropes. If you could lace them tighter the bed would be more comfortable. But there isn't much room and certainly no way of getting at the ropes next to the wall. So you pile some of your equipment at the head of the bunk, hunch around, to try and make yourself comfortable. Or a reasonable facsimile. You lie there, listening to the assorted conversations that are bubbling around the room. It's the usual big three, home, sex, food. Pick out whichever one you want. For the first time you notice home has slipped to the past tense. Was, instead of is.

Rules come out as if by divine order. Wear your cartridge belt and canteen at all times. Thus, in the event of abandoning ship—horrible thought—you will have the water to carry you over the waiting. Wear your life preserver at all times. They're bulky at first, but you find they can be used effectively as pillows, as seats, or just hung down your back where they bother nothing at all. Each man is serious now, ready to abide by rules. Because, for all the humor and the cock-eyed irregularities, the game has gotten a little more serious, a little more deadly. And the men know it.

An hour after we get on the ship they give the mess call. It turns out to be just that. Great streams of forlorn GI's fill the corridors of the ship, battling their way to the mess hall two decks below the 350th quarters. Formerly the ship's spacious salon, the hall now teems with hundreds of men, always hungry, and one independent KP. They are permanent KP's, the men notice with gratitude. An independent KP, one to a table. Before the voyage ends the men find the KPs a little too independent and resolve themselves into voluntary KP duty in order to insure eating at all.

The first night passes. All port holes sealed. No smoking while the ship is standing at the pier. No smoking except at specified places during the whole trip. There is a ruling which stands on the ship. It comes down floating along the grapevine, impressing itself on the minds of the soldiers. If a fire breaks out during the voyage that section of the ship where it starts is to be sealed off by great iron doors and allowed to burn off, men and all, to save the bulk of the personnel throughout the ship. Sentiment has no place here. Two of the Squadron men are broken in rank during the trip for sneaking a cigarette in the bathroom below decks.

This first night on board is something. Along the boat deck, along the promenade deck, down along the corridors, in what used to be the swimming pool, banked up to the ceiling in what were the ship's movie theatre, salons, halls, all these places are crammed, jammed with men. To walk means picking your way along the deck gingerly, because a neglected foot might tread on some sprawled form. Some men lay spread-eagled, some bunched into little uncomfortable-looking balls. Some angular, some knotted and twisted, distorted. The still, heavy, unfeeling sleep of tired men.

The morning of the 27th dawned clear and sunny. Loading had been completed during the night. The ship was low and heavy in the water, a tremendous load of humanity on her. Rumor said some 22,000 men and women. Fighting men—air force, nurses—MP detachments, bomb groups, civilian workers, John Steinbeck. All of them, American, British, Canadian, Australian, lumped together, walled in sides of steel from the Clyde. Some going home, some leaving home, all going east for the same reason. Among them the men of the 350th. They were clustered in the corridors, in the staterooms, along the decks. They sat and read books, played blackjack, shot craps, argued, talked, or just sat, looking out over the bow of the ship to the skyline of the city before them. At the towering finger of the Empire State. Or dead ahead the slender shaft of Rockefeller Center. But whether they played cards or read or sat, they were all waiting. The land they had already left behind.

About one o'clock on the 27th the great ship began to sluff her way out into the center of the river. Slowly she edged around backwards, feeling, groping, until

she lay parallel to Riverside Drive. She pointed down the river, down and out the narrows to the sea. Her great horn rumbled a hoarse farewell and, as she slipped downstream in the warm afternoon, the people of the city leaned from the windows, over the edges of their buildings, waving good-bye. She slid downstream very quietly. Down past 42nd Street, past the Hoboken ferry, past Wall Street and the Battery. Past the Statue of Liberty, past Staten Island. Out into the wider bay, out from Coney Island, Rockaway, Jones Beach. The men stood silent along the rails, perched on little vantage points all over the ship. Just looking. No one said much. For once there was no foolish joke of the moment. Just silence. They had been in Texas, in Wendover and Walla Walla, in Sioux City and Kearney, in Camp Williams and Camp Kilmer. This moment was the sum of all of these. So they just stood very quietly watching the old page turn slowly. And the page that came up for them was as clear and clean as that thin, steel line of horizon to the east.

Overhead a Navy blimp puttled along, keeping the watch. The ship sliced her way out to the limits of the harbor, passing through the aisles of laden convoy ships until, at length, she came to the lip of the sea. The men now no longer stood facing outwards, back to their land, but turned and gazed silently forward to the open. The wind began to blow chilly and the men came back to their books, their cards, their dice, their talk—and some slept again, fitfully, sprawled, bunched in little knots. The Queen sailed off into the night alone and took leave of America. Farewell to the blimp and everything that was home, back there in the purple flush in the west. Night came up out of the east and covered the sky and the water and the world out here. Men of the ship's company went around, covering the holes and the windows, locking in the lights of the ship, and she became a part of the night around her. The men slept, in rooms, in corridors, on the decks, slept and dreamed. Some of the future to come. Some of the past just gone. Some just sat and talked and tried not to remember that they had met no convoy. That they were crossing the Atlantic in May 1943 all by themselves. Some 20,000 of them, zig-zagging out into the black foreboding waters. After a while, even they slept. Only here and there a guard or an Officer of the Day walked quietly along the decks or sat in a corner, keeping the watch. This was the first night.



## PART 2

May 1943 to June 1943

### I

I have mentioned that during embarkation the First Sergeant was flushed and annoyed. He was more than that. After his chore was done and the last man was aboard and in his place, Kirn felt worse. His teeth chattered. He shook and felt hot and cold all at once. Something was definitely the matter. So he hunted out the doctor and got himself looked over. It was pneumonia, all right. Kirn was in the hospital bed before the Elizabeth ever sailed. He stayed there for the crossing. Later, as he grew a little better and found out what the accommodations were like, he settled down in his bed with sheets and springs and felt a little better. Though he protested loudly that he should be out there with the rest of the men.

Most of the men were up early the first morning out. They had to get up to get into the chow lines, for one thing. For another they wanted to see what was doing. But there was nothing to see except the broad level of the Atlantic. No periscopes, no nothing. The rest of the day they explored the ship. Except for a few special locations, they were free to go where they pleased. They found out how to get from the stern of the ship to the bow. They found the PX and they found long sweating lines in front of it. They gorged themselves on cookies and candy, reveled

in cigarettes that cost only five cents a package. They rooted into their A bags and began to show what had caused the weight of them.

At eleven each morning the loud-speaker system went into action and from it came a call to muster. This muster idea was a necessary arrangement to work for the safety of the whole. From the individual man's point of view it was a pain in the neck. Each unit was assigned to a place on the ship where—when the muster call had been given—it was to report in full strength. For example, the 350th was assigned to the port side of the promenade deck and when the eleven o'clock call came the 350th lined up—backs to the sea, facing inboard. And for over an hour each day they stood that way! Not talking or moving (you couldn't move!), ten deep, waiting for the signal to dismiss. All life preservers were correctly in place, all canteens filled with fresh water. Each man knew that this one thing might well become the one real happening on the voyage.

About twelve the muster was dismissed. The men who had slept on deck the night before gathered up their coats and their blankets and went below to claim their places in the staterooms. The men who had been below came up and found themselves a nook or cranny to shield them from the wind that always came up at night. Once below the new crop went to sleep, rising only for meals. Sometimes they looked at the long winding lines and decided to pass even meals.

Bathing became a major problem. Hot water was scarce and what there was, was salt water. The men groaned about that and some began to encourage scrawny beards in protest. Scrawny, for the most part, except for Nick Karaglou whose Grecian goatee became the envy of the men and the despair of the officers. About this time, too a faint shadow across the chin of Jim Griffith began to hint at the coming of a new member of the goatee class.

The following day was Decoration Day—in the States. But on the grey slate of the sea it was just another day. Men got up, made chow through that interminable line, filed out through the steaming rooms past the stone tubs, near scalding themselves as they washed out their mess kits, and returned to their places on the staterooms or deck. The weather began to grow warmer, which was unexpected to those whose eyes were pinned on Scotland, and the sea began to turn to a bluish-green, flecked with phosphorus. The ship, changing her course, once in every seven or eight minutes to elude the possible undersea raider, left a jagged, veering course of white against the green. Bits of seaweed floated by now and then. Several of the men claimed to have seen the tropical sea turtle floating by. But the balmy weather was brief.

Next morning cooler weather woke some of the men sleeping on deck. And, when the storm black-outs were taken down at six in the morning, the appearance of the sea confirmed the change. For the blue-green of the day before had changed to a cold-greyness and there were not even the bits of vegetation to give hint of life nearby. Men began to bring their overcoats and blankets on deck and the crowd that had found the Sergeant's Lounge grew larger still as the men sought to avoid the bite of the wind.

The feeding had become a little more organized by now. Instead of lining up anonymously in the halls the 350th now formed a line on the deck and raced down the curving stairs past A deck, down past B deck, to C deck and the mess hall. And if the officer in the lead, usually Lieutenant Clouter, went too fast, it usually followed that the tail of the line became lost in the scuffle. But the bulk made the dash and the system was better than it had been, at any rate.

Gambling got bigger and better as the hours began to stretch out. Blackjack, dice, faro, and what looked like fan-tan came into their own. Soon the whole of the ship was gripped in a gambling wave. It was impossible to walk around the boat and not run into a game of some sort in every alley and room. Men found that a good part of the time slipped away that way and a good part of their money, as well.



In fact, the Sergeant's Club became the paramount spot, the ship's Casino, for here the activity was organized on a twenty-four hour basis and there was no time when a mighty and impressive game—with very high stakes—was not in progress. Men were made and broken many times over the days of the journey. So many were broken, in fact, that Lieutenant Varian, looking at poverty all around, decided that some sort of a loan was in order so that the men could buy their candy and cigarettes. So he gave out loans, two dollar limit, to each man who actually needed it. Repayable at the first pay day!

On this day, too, the Red Cross bags were distributed. These small green cloth bags contained soap, cigarettes, sewing kit, pencil, paper and gum and a pocket sized novel. Each man in the Squadron got one. The 350th bags came from a unit in Maine. Those thoughtful people will never know how much good their little bags did. Two years later I know of men who were still using that same little draw-string bag in which to take their shaving articles on pass.

The cold continued through the next day. About nine-thirty in the morning there was a sudden blast from the sub cannon on the stern of the ship. A terrific blast that brought every man to his feet. Some few had heard the announcement over the ship's speakers that there was to be a firing test on the ship's guns, but they were few. Men who had been asleep started to their feet instantly awake. They made for open windows, portholes or open deck. Johnny Riffle, asleep below, woke with a start and came charging up the stairs to the open deck with his carbine in hand. Not without a fight, he said.

In succession it kept up. First the sub cannon. Then the pompoms with their chattering, typewriter staccato. Then it was over. The "war" had ended. The men swallowed and tried to settle back to peaceful ways.

But the "war" had left its mark. The following morning the men got up to a rumor. We had, the grapevine said, eluded a submarine during the night. It was one submarine that morning. By night it had been a wolf-pack. The men scanned the horizon uneasily again. They found out how easy it is to see what the mind's eye dictates. The sea was littered with periscopes for hours. At least, they looked like periscopes.

About two in the afternoon, right after the mid-day meal, a plane appeared over the sea, flying off starboard, very low against the horizon. The men gathered at the rails and watched her come. They saw the circles on her fuselage, on her wings and they knew her to be British. She came in low and fast, circling the ship several times and then went darting here and there over the ocean searching, making sure. The passengers became optimistic over an early arrival. But as evening came on she circled once more and left. And the Queen plowed on through seas that mounted and rolled, rocking her with a silent, spanking fury.

This argument between ship and sea was all right for those who were used to it. Nuggett Bernadac sitting huddled on a great pile of unused life preservers suddenly achieved a remarkable greenish pallor and disappeared behind the temporary wall that shielded the latrine from the open deck. He stayed there. Rank had no privilege. Lieutenant Bowers and the Surgeon himself, John Hardy, were "quartered" and felt drawn, as well. Some did and some didn't. It was a rough night. The grapevine said that the Germans were claiming over their radio that they had sunk the Queen Elizabeth. There were those on this particular night who quietly hoped the Germans would prove right on that point. But the Queen Elizabeth had her goal in sight. And storms, men's insides, and the Germans' claims were of no interest to her.

As the half-night faded off and daylight came again, the Squadron looked out on new vistas. For off on the right was the good green of Ireland and on the left was the stony, green-splotched look of Scotland. The men clung to every available spot on the decks and at the portholes to watch the land pass by. The ship came slowly up the rippled waters of the Clyde, picking her way past the anchorage



of freighters, past warships and carriers, and, finally, in the center of the harbor before the little town of Grennock, she dropped anchor. As safe and sound as she had left New York some six days before.

Everyone stood quiet, looking about them with the appearance of people just awakening. To the right across the bay a castle nestled against some woods. Before them the town—seemingly devoid of any population, the only clue to habitation being the slow curl of smoke from the many chimneys. Before them, in the basin of the harbor was the sight of a sunken ship. Only the tips of the masts and funnel poked above the water. The Squadron looked at this harbor souvenir and their eyes turned to the clear skies of the morning. They wondered. It had been decided by the authorities that the Group was not to disembark until the following day so that meant one more night on the ship.

The day passed. A day of idling, leaning over the sides of the ship to watch the other units load on the tenders, tossing nickels and quarters down into little boats that were drawn up alongside by most interested Scotsmen. Now and then a Spitfire or Hurricane would zoom past the ship, skimming low over the water, and sometimes, in the distance, you could see chains of landing craft as they churned up and down the estuary. But other than the regular run-of-the-mill sort of thing, there was little to do. The time passed slowly from day into night and when darkness finally came to Scotland it came very slowly, very reluctantly. And stayed only a few short hours.

At four-thirty in the morning of the 3rd of June the Squadron roused and dashed into the Mess Hall where they gulped down an early meal. It was A bags and full equipment all over again. They assembled on the Promenade deck. A bags, raincoats, overcoats, musette bags, carbines were all tossed into an impenetrable, jungle-like mess. There was not enough room to operate in. At seven-thirty Sergeant Peterson, acting for the First Sergeant who had made a spectacular removal from the ship via stretcher the previous day, called the roll in debarkation order. The men of the upper three grades lined up as their names were called, butting the hapless others with their equipment, shoving their carbine barrels into rumps and backs indiscriminately. And finally, lined up, they went off down the stairs, clumping and bumping, led by Lieutenant Varian and Lieutenant Tienken with Captain Bowman along for moral support. As the first group pulled out, the second formed. This consisted of buck sergeants beginning with Martinson and continuing down the roster through corporals, pfcs, and privates. With Lieutenants Seibert and Paul to lead, and me to call the roll and try to line them up, the group finally got together. There were approximately twenty minutes between the departure of the first half and the second, so that, by the time that the second had reached the town on the other side of the bay, the first group was well on its way to England.

The boat that took us off the ship was a typical British river tender. Appropriately named the George VI. And on her the 350th spilled. They were herded off the deck, down into a large salon-like room in the hold of the little ship. Jampacked into this inferno of heat and stuffy air, they once again sat on their A bags. Some with their helmets off, holding them loosely in their laps. Others with them on, uncaring, while the unfastened straps dangled around their chins.

The deck was below the water line. That meant there was no way of knowing when the ship started or stopped other than by the driving or reversal of the ship's engines. Finally someone said we were there and everybody began to bustle around and regird for the move again.

This time we came up out of the hold onto a stone quay where we were welcomed, somewhat surprisingly, by the strains of martial music rendered by a rather sad-looking band running through a repertory of such things as Give My Regards to Broadway—most inappropriately—Tipperary, and something that went

by the name of the Lancashire Goose Girl. And then it was "left face" and the men moved quickly off the quay into the adjacent station where the train waited. On to the train, after tossing the A bag into the baggage car, into the little strange compartments seating eight, four to a side. A cup of tea and donuts doled out by kindly Scotswomen who raced up and down the length of the train. But there was little time. A shrill whistle, a grunt, and the train began to roll out of the station.

As we moved out of Grennock we caught our first glimpse of this new, strange country. Signs along the road "Bovril," "Hovis," and how they were good for anaemic girls prompted comment. Griffith began an immediate program of fostering better Anglo-American relations—he'd been told you could get promoted for things like that over here—so he leaned from the window giving off with a violent V for Victory sign and yelling "Cheerio" at the same time to the startled natives who lined the tracks or leaned from their back windows. Within five minutes Griff found the "thumbs up" sign was apparently more the style, so he changed and carried right on. Earl Neville, Jimmy Dunn and Glenn Myers, all Southerners, weren't interested in the first few miles. But even they couldn't resist the excitement for long and were at the windows before Grennock was completely passed.

As the train rolled along through the backyards and business centers of the towns and villages there were signs—unmistakable signs—of the bombings. A building gone here and there and, farther up the Clyde, as the train came near to Glasgow, the sky became peppered with the silver, sausage-like barrage balloons, each steady, unmoving, high in the sky on the end of its thread-like cable. Now and then camouflaged gun emplacements. Quite suddenly, the train stopped. The men gazed down off the edge of the rail bridge into High Street, Glasgow. They flirted with the girls of the shops and the factories—and the girls flirted right back. But it was a short stop and the train pulled out, making for the open country. Finally the train came down the gorge between the Burns Memorial and the castle high on the bluff. Someone said this was Edinburgh.

Here in Edinburgh they got a break. They fell out on the station platform where the British Armed Canteen fed them tea and coffee and they got a chance to stretch a bit. But apparently someone had a schedule and we were on the train again, headed this time down the very edge of the Eastern coast towards London. It seemed for a little while that the tracks were on the very edge of the North Sea. Many of us eyed the water with just a little distaste. Some because of the recent trip—but most of us because we suddenly realized that that little strip of water was all that stood between us and the enemy himself. From Kearney, Nebraska, to the doorstep of the Nazis was a pretty big jump, all in a few weeks.

Down the coast we went. The engineer seemed to be in a hurry to get us wherever we were going. He put on all the pressure he had and dragged us along, chasing the other half of the 350th down the east coast of England!

We sat, watching the countryside and the beaches whizz by. We could see the barbed-wire entanglements they had erected along the beaches to keep the invader out. We could see the iron hunks tossed in the centers of their pasture lands to prevent aircraft from landing. We flew past RAF landing fields and saw what buildings looked like disguised as farms and barns and fields. We came through towns that had felt the touch of the enemy, saw the chewed corners of buildings. We saw Liberators, Lancasters, Hudsons and Wellingtons warming up on air fields, getting ready. Farther down the coast our eyes widened and our stomachs pinched a little at the sight of sleek little Spitfires racing low over the grassy countryside, barely clearing the top of the train, rushing off on the other side of us, across the fields towards targets on the beach. From their wings we could see the blast of fire, a bright yellow-spotch in the sky and a great sheet of sand shoot heavenwards. Tracers which could be seen from the train marked the trail of their shooting. Then they would wheel, bank and come down across the fields again to

take another shot at the target. And as they came skimming past the train over and again, the men's eyes narrowed and they remembered what to do—or tried to remember—what to do in case of air raid, strafing and all the rest. All they could remember was that they were supposed to lie flat on the floor of the car.

The afternoon wore on. The train slid into the great, glassed-over station at Newcastle-on-Tyne. We got out again to stretch and came back to our seats with a grab-bag dinner. Typical English cold meat pie, fruit pie, candy, gum and a small inoffensive, pale, British apple. It wasn't quite like the meals we got at home. But it was something.

It was about ten-thirty that night when the section ahead of us pulled into the little town of Wellingsboro, in Northampshire. It was pitch black under the total black-out and the men were gathered off the train, bundled into GI trucks and whisked out of town. Driving swiftly and loudly along the narrow British lanes to the field. The convoy raced and bounced and finally came to the village of Poddington and the air field. This was AAF Station 109. The men leaned out of the backs of the trucks and tried to see where they were going, what it was like. But you couldn't see anything. When they got out of the trucks there was nothing to see but trees and grass and hedges. They went into mess halls and were fed, dropping their equipment with a great sigh of relief. This was the end of the trail which had led over most of America, an ocean and what seemed like most of the British Isles. They were called to attention, still in the mess hall, to listen to a few prepared words delivered by Lieutenant Colonel George Dauncey.

Dauncey had a fairly good speech. He had picked a very poor time to deliver it. The men were travel-tired and the speech was long, involved and dull. It was almost midnight and no time to talk of Piccadilly and its Commandos, nor even precautions against air raids, the importance of maintaining the green camouflage. It was no time to tell systems devised for air raid alarms, though this managed to arouse the interest of the men in spite of their weariness. Dauncey pridefully announced that there would be NO alert, no warning until the bombs were "actually falling". There were a number of men who were inclined to think that the Colonel was waiting a little too long to give his signals.

This farce went on for an hour or more. Finally, Dauncey relented and the men were assigned beds. They went to them and fell in and on them.

The second contingent arrived much later that night. It was about two in the morning. They went through the same ritual, the feeding, the long-winded speech by the Colonel. He began just before four in the morning. It was almost five-thirty when he finished. As he began I glanced at Lieutenant Varian who had tilted his chair against the wall and closed his eyes. He had heard it all when the first group arrived earlier.

"What is it?" I asked.

Varian opened one eye. "It's simply awful", he said heavily and closed his eye.

It was. My arms, my legs, my feet, my head, my back—all ached with fatigue. All around me the men I had brought from Scotland slept, heads on their arms some sitting bolt upright, some sprawled across the tables. Still the Colonel droned on and on. Finally he quit. The men roused and went off to their huts and their beds, glassy-eyed with weariness. By six on the morning of the 4th of June there wasn't an officer or enlisted man on Station 109 awake.

## II

The next morning we got a look at Station 109. The field was dispersed, each Squadron occupying an area of its own, removed, separate from the others. Thus the 350th lived by itself and worked out its own problems from the start. The 350th bedded down on the road that led to the PX and the Mess Hall. The small building that was to house the Orderly Room stood on this road. No other



department was set to operate yet. It was the Orderly Room that set up shop, with Sergeant Peterson in charge, acting as First Sergeant, in the absence of Sergeant Kirn who was to remain at a Scottish hospital for a recuperative month. Pete, who had always wanted to be a First Sergeant, reigned in all his glory.

Hardly had the Squadron set foot in Poddington than the ominous rumors of a complete administrative reorganization began to filter through. Colonel Dauncey, who had presided over the meeting the night before, had preceded the arrival of the ground echelon and had made several trips to Wing Headquarters. Apparently between them some sort of newer and more efficient operational set up had been devised. England was under the overall command of Major General Devers, who had the European Theatre, General Ira Eaker who headed the 8th Air Force, and under them came the Bomber Command. Then the Wing, and finally, the Colonel himself. Somewhere along the line someone had fired a devastating broadside against the whole Group and its administrative structure. Throughout the training period it had worked efficiently, covering all the needed essentials. But apparently it wasn't enough. What began this first day at Poddington was only the beginning of a month of discouragement and inefficiency. It was a month of bad management that struck hard at the Squadron morale, blocking progress from within and without the Group.

The unit personnel system was invoked immediately. That meant that a consolidation was effected whereby all records and personnel departments of the individual Squadrons were taken into Group Headquarters at the far end of the field, leaving only the First Sergeant and a couple of clerks to handle the Orderly Rooms. So, from the 350th, Sergeants Garic and Chandler, with their half-pint assistant, Cpl. Pancho Ramirez, packed up their records and their payrolls and went off down the road to work.

During the first morning the first consignment of bicycles arrived and the rest of the day officers and men attempted to master the intricacies of the art. They managed mainly to bounce their posteriors on the asphalt roadway.

Late in the afternoon the orderly room learned to its dismay that this stop was only a temporary one. That they were to move again to a new field in the east of England. They didn't say anything to the troops, already a little on the caloused side from travelling.

The men themselves had little to do. The planes had not arrived. They lay around on their sacks, waiting for someone to tell them what to do. Late in the afternoon they were marched up the road to the assembly hall and given a detailed lecture on how to act in England. They learned that "fanny" was a word in disrepute over here, that there were a great many other words to be avoided, as well. That they were wealthy in comparison with the standards they would meet in the drinking and eating places outside, that a show of their money and their advantages was in bad taste and likely to cause resentment among the natives. They were given a history of the reasons why they were here in England, along with a gentle threat of things that might happen to those who ignored these warnings. They were, in a word, put on their honor.

On the following day classes in aircraft recognition were started in the Red Cross Building. So that the men could learn the outlines of the planes of the Allies as well as those of the enemy. It might come in handy one of these days, they hinted.

That's all that happened on the 6th of June. It was enough.

The next day rationing went into effect for the first time. With a small card in hand, a man lined up—or queued up, as they learned to say—in front of the Post Exchange. When they finally got inside they found that with their little card—and about five shillings—they could buy seven packages of cigarettes—you called the brand of three of the packs and took what they wanted to give you to make up



the rest. You could draw two bars of candy, some lifesavers, some mints, a bar of soap, two razor blades, two cigars, a can of smoking tobacco, and two boxes of matches, as well, each week. That was all.

On this, the third night, the first Liberty Run was scheduled and a good percentage of the men went off in the trucks to the towns of Northampton and Bedford. It was their first time in an English town and they made the most of it. Some of them got tangled up right off the bat with the British ATS girls, and some ended up with Northampshire farmerettes and Land Girls. Some just went drinking or to the movies.

The main trouble with English money seemed not with the coins which could be reckoned somewhat by their relative size to American coins. But the difficulty seemed to lie in the pound notes. The men treated them as though they were just one little old dollar bill. Instead of the four American dollars that one pound represented. Sometimes it worked and ignorance paid off to their advantage.

### III

In the meantime, the crews headed by Major Cleven and carrying several of the top-ranking ground men with them for maintenance, had left Kearney and gone back to Wendover again for a final, intensified two-week training period. Along with them from the ground echelon were Harry McMillion, the Line Chief, Albert Strain, Louis Hays, Lawrence Bowa, Bill Jackson, Thomas Madel, and for flying assistance, Lieutenant Robert V. Kaiser.

The first two weeks spent at Wendover were quiet. The boys found that the field had made some changes since they were there last in December. A larger, more spacious PX, a cafeteria and a bigger movie house. But on the whole, the place was the same old barren deserted salt flat field that it had been before. It would take far more than a new PX to change the face of things in Utah.

During their stay, the crews managed to wangle themselves one 36-hour pass which most of them spent in Elko and Ely of loved remembrance. Conditions in the barracks must have reached an all-time high for something, for when Colonel Travis—he of the fishing rod scandal—came through on an official inspection he found the 350th area so delightfully revolting that he sent for a photographer to make a permanent record of the mess. Copies of which were to be forwarded to all stations within the 2nd Air Force to show how things should *NOT* look at any time. This sorry mess resulted in the restriction of the whole base—from good old Colonel Dippy on down.

Finally the crews finished up their training and headed back to Kearney to be processed, much as we had processed other Groups during the other days. This took only a few days. The men were, of course, restricted to the post and had no opportunity to get into town at all. There was no incident at Kearney.

When they finally took off from Kearney, they did so without a given destination. This was to be given to them via radio as they flew east. They got it over Fort Wayne, Indiana. The message to land was given and they did so. Later some of the ships went on to a field in Michigan and others went east to Syracuse, New York. Finally they all came to a rest in Bangor, Maine, where for five days they sat and waited for their clearances to come through.

It came eventually and the planes proceeded to two places—some of them going to Gander Lake and others to Goose Bay, Gander in Newfoundland, and Goose Bay in Labrador. These points then were to be the hopping off place for the flight across the Atlantic. They rested here, pulled guard duty around the planes, and sweated out the word to start.

During the stay the men found out that most of the enjoyable things of life were to be had. There were wine, women and song, and most of them freely accessible. There was nothing to do in the way of work, except to keep an eye on

the ships, so all the bulk of them had to do was lie around the barracks and amuse themselves. Shortly, however, after their arrival, the word spread around that a number of fifth columnists—saboteurs—had been landed on the island for the express purpose of undermining the structure of the landing field and doing whatever damage they could to the planes. Two or three of them were eventually captured but the guard was intensified and doubled on each plane throughout the standing period. But incidents never occurred and, finally, after the long and monotonous wait, orders came through. The planes made ready to leave.

When they took off they were part of a large group, heading out to sea almost eagerly, so anxious were they to get over there, to get into "action" after all the months that had gone by already. A little way out from the Newfoundland coast one of the ships—not in the Squadron—was stricken and plunged into the cold greyish northern waters. But whether or not there were any survivors, no one could tell. The group of Forts continued unhesitatingly on their way east, and left the crash to the coast patrols down below.

The weather was fair on the trip across and as they neared the opposite side the planes split their formation. Lieutenant DeMarco and crew landed in Iceland, where they refueled and then came on down across England to land at Poddington. They were the first to rejoin the ground crew and, as they circled the field, they brought the men from their beds in wild excitement. The family was coming back together. Everyone stood out on the road, watching the green ship as it slowly wheeled around in a great circle, its landing wheels lowered, preparing to come in.

The rest of the ships set down at Prestwick, the airport in Scotland, to await better flying conditions over England before proceeding inland to Poddington. After a night in Prestwick they took off, heading down the west coast only to have their plans changed again by the RAF leader. He led them right back to Prestwick to spend another night.

However, on the second try, things fared a little better and the planes came down the coast and in over the Midlands. They finally spotted Northampton and a little farther on, the new home. Down they came, circling the field in a continuing procession. The ground men clumped in the roads and areas, waved and cheered in the late afternoon sunlight. Home had come the heroes. Fifteen minutes later the Major sat easily on the edge of the table in the orderly room and talked about the past six weeks. The Major had arrived. The whole family was all together again. And this time, for action.

#### IV

The 8th of June was a big day. First of all came the plans for the move to the new base. We had had a hint of it for the past week. But no one knew when or where. Varian gave the news to the men, crammed and huddled in a hut for the meeting.

"We're going to move," he said. Groans! "We're going to our own base. A new base. Down in Southern England. Down where things are popping!" Awed silence. "In fact, the base is near the town that's the second most bombed town in England." Stricken silence. They hadn't gotten used to the silent nights around Poddington yet. "You've got to be careful, pay attention to the rules, obey the camouflage discipline and, remember, each of you is responsible for the safety of the whole field." The men sighed heavily, looked over to the corner and the pile of A bags and grunted to themselves.

Right after lunch most of the men made for the Red Cross Building where the Special Service Section presented a show—our first overseas show—Stubby Kaye and his American entertainers in "Show Time". It was good to see the girls from home. We'd been overseas a week, away from New York for two, and we missed 'em. I think there was more enjoyment in that little show than most of the big ones we'd seen on Broadway a few weeks back. There was a personal note in

the show, too. For when the "Ball of Fire" called for a volunteer from the audience to sing to, Pfc Kenneth Beale mounted the stage and blushed and fell in love with her on the spot. I can't say we blamed him very much.

But most of the Squadron didn't get to see the whole show through. Towards the end of the performance there was an announcement over the loud-speaker system—they called them a Tannoy in this country—that all the men of the 350th had to report back to the area immediately. They found out that the eagle had done what he is supposed to do and hadn't for sometime—it was pay day!

So they lined up in usual order and went through the pay line with Lieutenant Varian, aided by Lieutenants Tienken and Seibert sweating out the pay off. Their first payroll with English money—pounds, shillings, and pence. The officers weren't very sure. The men had no idea at all. They simply, trustingly, took what was offered and walked away with a handful of coins and paper money, grinning at each other, scratching their heads. They had a lot of money and nowhere to go. Tomorrow was moving day all over again.

The men, as usual, were divided into two sections. The air echelon was flying over, of course. We divided up and fell out in front of the Orderly Room. The first group, headed as before by Lieutenant Varian, and the second in command of Seibert. At six in the morning the first group left and the others followed at about a half hour interval. The trucks went down to Wellingboro and, after about four hours on the train, through the midlands eastward, through Cambridge and Bury St. Edmunds they came to a little town whose name "Diss" they could read on the half-moon plates under the station lampposts. There in all his glory on the platform was good old Colonel Dauncey. The men poured off the train, down off the platform into the waiting trucks.

It seemed as if we had no sooner sat down than the trucks tore down the hill, turned left and started racing out of the little town into the country. Up over the little bridge they swung, along the curving leafy road. Through a little town at the fork of the road, a swing to the right, up the hill past a big pub called the Kings Head, down a long winding hill to another pub with a great old windmill standing on a grassy knoll behind it. Up a long hill, down a level and then a sharp, lurching turn to the left into the camp. The trucks passed an area of tin huts and a row of brick houses, turned to the left, turned to the right and then ground to a clashing stop. The men shook themselves, gathered together and got out in the bright noon-day sun. They were beside a long, tin-roofed building whose middle was solid, joined to an identical wing behind. The mess hall. They went inside and had had their first meal.

## V

The 350th had been assigned to Site 4. They walked back down the road for about a half mile and then turned off to the left towards the site of concrete barracks and scattered Niessen huts that stood by a wooded clump on the little rise. They hit the barracks, drew their mattresses—three biscuits, some filled with kapok and some with straw, laid them out on the beds, spread out their GI blankets and the two grey British numbers that had been issued, tossed on the hard bolster that was to be a pillow, took off their equipment and threw themselves on the cot. This was home! Maybe this was the end of all the moving. Later on some of them walked around the field to see what the set-up was like. Site 4 was near to the main gate and the highway. You walked out of the area up the road and came to the main road that led to the gate. Turn to the left past Site 6, down the road and you came to the gate. Turn to the right, down past the 349th area, past the little pink concrete house with the thatched roof and the two brick houses on each side of the road, and you came to an intersection. Turn to the left and follow the road out past the Chemical Company, past the road to the Mess Hall, past the row of civilian houses and you came to the roads that led to Site 5 and 6.



Site 5 on the left where the 418th had settled down. Site 6 at the end of the road where the 351st had taken up residence. Between the two areas you could turn off on a road to the right and follow down to the woods and the site where the MP company was to live. Just in front of the bomb dump area. Then down to the right, coming past the Post Exchange to the Mess Hall's north end, you hit the community showers and wash rooms, officers and enlisted men each having a building. Then to the left up the road where you came to an intersection again. Straight ahead into the woods you'd find the station hospital and dispensary. To the right you'd pass the RAF NAAFI hut and then come to another road. Turn right you'd hit **the road to the main gate**. Turn left you'd run out to the perimeter, which was the concrete track around the field on which the planes taxied to and from their dispersal areas and to the take-off runways. Keep straight ahead and you'd come to the construction area, the Clerk of the Works (British Air Ministry) headquarters on the right and the Station guardhouse on the left. The road ran into another road. Turn left and you'd go out past the parachute department, past the link trainer buildings, past the road leading into the motor pool, past the big hangar to the perimeter. Turn right and you'd come to the Operations Building and the Station Headquarters building, the chapel, the officers' mess and the combat mess buildings. Follow the road as it curved across the field and you'd pass the Quartermaster warehouses, past the Officers site (called the WAAF site from the days when the WAAFs—women personnel of the Royal Air Force—used to live there)—and another road. Right back to the original intersection leading to the main gate or the mess hall, left along the back of the 349th area, past the two static pools (just stagnant ponds for the farmer's use) around and up the little incline to Site 4, the 350th, and the point you'd started from.

There were by-ways and off roads. For example, had you turned into the road just past the guardhouse, the one that led into the Motor Pool where all the jeeps and trucks of all units were stationed and maintained, had you continued straight through the woods on the road, you'd have passed the Chemical Warfare buildings on your left, the gas chamber, and you'd have come to the top of the little hill and the assembled buildings of the communications center. The road continued on out past these to the perimeter track which had turned this way. Or you could turn off on the intersection left along the communications buildings and you'd have gone past Group Armament and the Intelligence buildings where the crews were to be interrogated and the reports of their activities worked out and chalked up in the days to come.

Or if you'd have gone on out to the perimeter track and started around its three-mile length you'd have passed the concrete areas off the main track that reminded you of enlarged parking zones off of a one-way road. Here the planes would be parked and here the maintenance work would be carried on. There were hangars here. Only two. The one just off the perimeter by the Motor Pool and another on the far side of the perimeter track. They were for complete overhauling of planes. Otherwise the planes remained out in the open and the crews maintained them there. So you came onto the perimeter track just past the communications block and turned right and followed the track around. It was a broad concrete track, not a complete perfect oval as you might imagine, but a curving broad highway for the ships to taxi along from their dispersal areas. You followed it along and around the curves. Here on the left was the head of a broad uncurving stretch of concrete that stretched across from this side of the perimeter to the other. A runway. You went on around. On the right was a tin hut with another little hut just behind it, just where the perimeter turned and went north. That was the 350th Technical Supply buildings where the items of air corps equipment for maintenance and for flying the aircraft would be issued. Next to it was a high dirt mound that was the shooting revetment, before which the planes would test fire their guns or the



men would in future fire their revolvers or their carbines. On out along the perimeter. On the right was a road that led to the 350th Armament shop. And past the big hangar on the right. On out past the dispersals all along the way, past the head of the main runway as it joined the perimeter track and then swing around the curve and head west along the great length of the perimeter. Down past more dispersal points and then you'd come to the tower, the control tower. Here the nerve center of the air field. Here they kept check of their ships on the ground and in the air. Here word given to allow a ship to start the race down the long runway and the climb into the sky. Here was the eye of the field, a two story white tower looking south over the flatness of the field over to the crest of the hill that dipped off the perimeter's far side down into the lower level of the living camp. Down the perimeter still farther, past more dispersals. Past the gasoline dump and the road to the right that led off the field to the town of Dickelburgh and then swinging to the left across the foot of the broad main runway and then swinging left again and back east past the bomb dump and the Ordnance department. Up past the dispersals again towards the looming figure of the big hangar just off the perimeter by the motor pool, past the road to Group Headquarters, past the little building on the left in a clump of trees that was the 350th Engineering department, and around the sharp curve to the south and there was the road leading to the communications block and down into the motor pool again.

That was the field. This was Station 139. Set in the fields of grain and sugar beets, set down on the estates owned and controlled by Sir Edward Mann. Set down in Norfolk, alongside a little village called Thorpe Abbott lying just outside the Tech Supply huts on the east. This was Thorpe Abbott, Station 139. Twenty some miles south of Norwich, twenty some miles north of Ipswich. Five miles east of Diss, some thirty miles west of Great Yarmouth and the North Sea. This was our home. Set down among the homes of the few simple farm families that stood within the very field itself. A cluster of houses that had been called Upper Billingsford for hundreds of years on end.

And what about the site itself. Site 4. The 350th? As you entered coming from the perimeter you came to the little Niessen hut that was called the "picket post". This was the orderly room. Immediately behind it stood a long concrete barracks into which the officers had moved. Then there was another Niessen hut one end of which was turned over to the supply department for their building. The front end housed some flying officers. In front of this was the officers' wash room or ablutions room. In front of that alongside the road, the officers' latrine. Then a concrete barracks filled with flying personnel. Behind it over against the backdrop of the woods three long concrete barracks for the flying enlisted men. As the road passed the site it forked, one fork taking you up to the main road over which you walked to get to the main gate or the mess hall. The other fork went on up the incline into the Squadron area itself. On the right was a concrete barracks into which more flying personnel moved. Then you came to the head of the fork and the enlisted men's latrine on the left and the enlisted men's wash room on the right. There before you lay the area itself. There was a concrete walk in an almost perfect square, bordered by huts and barracks. You turned up the walk from the latrine. Behind it lay barracks 7 and into it went the clerks and odds and ends of the small departments of two and three men each. Then barracks 8 at the end of the walk as it turned to the right, bordered by barracks 8, then 9, and 10. The engineers took this over. Then the walk swung to the right again. Barracks 11, communications. Barracks 12, the Ordnance men, and then lengthwise along the walk Barracks 13, into which the Armorers went. Then the walk turned right again. Three Niessen tin huts faced the walk here on the left. Cooks, KP's and general personnel lived in them. Next the wash room on the left, and a Niessen hut on the

right just before you came again to the latrine. Spare flying personnel and some ground personnel moved in together here.

All the barracks were furnished with single cots at first. In the Niesisen huts heat was supplied by a single air-tight stove in the center of the building. Soft coal. In the larger, longer, concrete barracks, two stoves at each end of the building were used. A furnace in the rear of the wash room fought a losing battle with an undersized boiler to furnish hot water for washing. No shower facilities. They could be had at stated times at the general shower building down by the mess hall.

The fields and the area in between and in front of the barracks were grassy. They must be kept this way. If persons avoided stepping off the road, riding off the road and from cutting across fields the camp would avoid detection by enemy observer planes. They were very strict about this. With good reason. Down in back of the three combat crew barracks there was an air raid shelter made of brick, against which the earth had been piled and tamped. It was an open shelter designed to keep the flying bits of shrapnel and bits of shells from hitting the personnel. There were five of them all together in the area. The one down in back of the combat crew barracks, one between the enlisted men's wash room and the flying personnel barracks along the road, one between the Ordnance and Armorer barracks, one in the corner of the area by Barracks 10, and another in the corner of the area next to the woods between Barracks 7 and 8. The men lost no time in locating them and marking them. The adjutant had said this was a very bombed area. And shelters were business.

The 350th came to Thorpe Abbott and settled down and got ready to do business. They looked around them and felt a permanence, a possession in all these things. They set to work building shelves to hang their clothes and places to put up their pictures of the wife, the mother, the girl friend. Or the pin-up they had lugged over from the States.

## VI

Things happened right from the start at Thorpe Abbott. First off the bat Colonel Howard M. Turner, commanding the Group since the removal of Colonel Darr Alkire in Kearney in April, was withdrawn and given a new assignment and his place taken by Colonel Hugh Q. Huglin.

Huglin was a West Pointer, harsh, brittle, and he had the courage of his convictions and, right or wrong, the rank to back his orders. His idea as near as could be determined was to centralize the Group, drawing the bulk of his administrative strength from the backbone of the Squadrons. For example, he abolished S-2, Intelligence, as a Squadron function and set up a Group S-2, utilizing all the Squadron personnel, officers and enlisted men alike. Captain Bowman, and Lieutenants Bowers and Juster, along with Sgt. Warren Nelson and Corporals Derleth, Skaggs and DeLeonardo became the first men to move out of the area and take up residence under the Group aegis. They were still members of the Squadron. But they moved out to an area set aside for them. So the first concrete threat to the Family of the Squadron came with their removal. The Squadron sat up and took notice. The Colonel was moving. And his ways were not so mysterious.

Readjustments in Group headquarters reflected themselves down through the Squadrons. Work in the orderly room grew by leaps and bounds. In addition to the number of routine details that had to be furnished by men of the unit, more important and inescapable routines were added. The first days of Thorpe Abbott found the Squadron having to drag men off the streets to fill the hurry-up calls for detail men from Group Headquarters. Guards had to be supplied at the tune of 20 men per each day for four and five days in a row. With this sort of thing going on it meant that virtually every man in the Squadron was on some sort of detail. The linemen, Engineers, Ordnance, Armament, Communications, which made up the bulk of the ground personnel, were busy with the arrival of the ships and the

heavy flying training schedule that had been set up. But they were not exempt from these other extra duties. They grouched and grumbled and went on about their work. The flying crews were exempt.

The Squadron had to find a Charge of Quarters each night. Someone who would sit throughout the night in the Orderly Room by the telephone, prepared to deliver messages throughout the area, to receive the air raid warnings by phone, to keep the staff informed of any unusual events. But with the presence of the enemy so close by, there was not much of a problem finding a man who would sit up for the Squadron. Every man was "plane conscious" and his eyes swept the skies every time a droning noise was heard in the distance. That first night—after the lights went out and the pitch blackness came on—the searchlights started up from all the hidden places in the fields of Norfolk. Playing over the skies in long, sweeping, probing movements and the air was filled with the steady throb of engines for what seemed hours at a time. Some even heard the sounds of bombs somewhere in the distance. So from then on the job of CQ wasn't hard to sell.

On the 10th of June the first Liberty Run went into Norwich. They jammed the trucks and bounced and swayed across the countryside to the city and came back with glowing accounts of women and fun and the Castle on the hill in the center of the city and the wreckage from German bombs that had torn great bites out of the very center of the city.

On the 13th the Colonel held a long-feared meeting. He announced his changes of policy. They were radical changes compared with what had gone on before. He shifted a number of the Group's ranking officers, some up, some down. The Colonel seemed to be working on the "new broom sweeps clean" policy. But the big punch came in the method of handling the general personnel of the combined Squadrons.

He set up Group departments that covered all the major departments: Engineering, Operations, Armament, Ordnance and Personnel. S-4, too. These departments were to be manned by personnel drawn from the Squadrons. In addition, the station Provost Marshal had to have permanent guards, the Crash Truck and the Fire Trucks, and the PX and the Salvage, Special Services, Officers' Club and the Mess Halls, BOQ Orderlies, Chemical Warfare and Transportation . . . all of them and more. Wanted, needed, to be supplied. The Colonel had decreed that these men were to be supplied to these functions *regardless* of whatever crippling of normal outlined duties might result.

It was a terrific struggle, trying to pick the men for the jobs. It was easy enough to halve or quarter the Ordnance section, send them off to Group Ordnance. The same thing applied to Engineering and to Armament and the other specialized departments. But when it came to supplying the menial details that had to be done it was not so easy. Everyone from the Major on down agreed that it was not a fair deal. No one desired to take a man that had been schooled and trained in a particular job such as engineering and armament, take that man and put him into an officer's quarters to tidy up or on permanent KP, or to stand guard every night in a war zone. But it had to be done. Nothing could alter that fact.

So Lieutenant Varian and Sergeant Peterson sat down with the roster of the ground personnel and the classification index. They talked to the department heads trying to split the departments to the eventual satisfaction of all. When the lists were finished the final results showed armorers working in the BOQ's and engineering men KP's and the provost marshal got his share of linesmen and clerks as well. Communications and all the rest contributed their share to the general pool. The Squadron waited for the Colonel's approval.

On the charts on the Colonel's desk the plan looked fine. But no sooner had the assignments been made than the squawks began. One officer had a calling for stree men. Only two showed up. Then he called and demanded the other man.



But the other man had in the meantime been recalled to his original job. There was no replacement for him, so that officer went wanting a man. His disposition went hay-wire and that was the end of the good humor that had struggled to keep alive around the post. Those who had control of the men in the home area simply shut up, refusing to let their men go until the thing was definite and workable.

The officers caught the reassignment too. Lieutenant Paul got the Post Exchange, and Captain Bowman became the base Public Relations officer. Lieutenants Bower and Juster had already been added to Group S-2 while Lieutenant McMahon and Nordrum became a part of the Station Armament set-up. Lieutenant Caverly was named as Station Defense Officer and he spent his first days making elaborate plans for the possible defense of the station against paratroop attack. Sgt. William Muller and John Cox, Robert Landphere and Chester Brown joined him as enlisted aid. Those four moved out of the area to the gun emplacements along the perimeter in order to be on the spot in case of trouble.

Lieutenant Seibert became the Station Billeting officer and tried to find accommodations where there were none. Little was left within the Squadron except Lieutenant Varian, Lieutenant Tienken and the Major in their original capacities. The Major just sat around the orderly room quietly and grew more and more disgusted.

"If I can't have 'em under my control," he'd explode, "I don't want the responsibility of 'em." He eyed his men being sent all over the post and didn't like it.

It wasn't so much the idea of being "farmed out" to do other jobs that bothered the men as it was the threat that they would be made to move out of the area, away from the Squadron. This was the part that irritated the Major as well. They all feared the breakup and parting from their Squadron. In so far as the actual move was concerned it did not seem probable at this date and this was the factor that acted as a sort of mainstay to the general morale of the unit. Aside from the S-2 men who had already left and the men manning the guns on the perimeter, no one had been moved out yet.

Because of all this confusion and lack of a definite plan on the parts of the higher command there began to grow within the whole Group a feeling of annoyance and a slow-down of the very effort that was so important to their success. The general attitude—and this was shared by all the personnel of the Station from the highest ranking officers down through the lowest enlisted man—was a "to hell with it" one. A serious, grave threat to the esprit de corps and a loss of ground that had taken months to gain ever since that initial loss when the unit had been sidetracked at Kearney six months before.

The general sign was no longer the V for Victory nor the Thumbs Up attitude but more the shrug of a shoulder. Little was being done to correct it. This was the situation on the 18th of June. The Group was scheduled to be operational on the 25th. There was one week to tidy up the house and get ready for the job to be done.

Colonel Huglin must have yielded. The plan was moderated and cooperation picked up. The morning calisthenics—at six a. m., along the sides of the road in the area—was called off. The tempo of the training flying was increased and the drain of little annoyances from Group dropped to a low. The men who had been farmed out to other jobs stayed there, true. But everyone was left living at home, and that was just what they wanted most of all.

All the maintenance departments worked hard. It seemed as if everywhere you looked men were working very hard. The day for the first mission was very, very close. Everyone from the Major to the KP's in the kitchen was excited, tense and ready. The word got around that everything was on the level now. The morale soared rapidly. The men worked, very hard, very quickly, and very well. When the sun came up out of the North Sea, out of Germany and the German-~~he~~

continent across the water, on the morning of June 25, 1943, all the months of training, all the little misunderstandings, all of the confusion that had been and nearly wrecked the picture in the past weeks, all these things were drowned out in the steady roar from the engines of the ships as they warmed up for their job. As the first roared down the runway with that rising crescendo and the sudden dip of sound as it lifted from the concrete, men all over the field, the men who didn't fly, lifted their heads and glanced towards the perimeter. Their chins went a little higher. They drew the sharp, quick breath of men in war.

"Go give 'em hell, boys." He might say very softly and yet with firm pride. "Give 'em the business". And then he went on doing whatever his job in this business was. The machine was complete; the fight was our fight now. There was a reason now. The planes, high against the morning sky, edging themselves together into formation before they headed east, carried the reason. But no more than the men who walked the ground below already waiting for them to come back.



### PART 3

JUNE 1943 TO OCTOBER 1943

#### I

I think I'll always remember the morning of the first mission.

The morning dawned clear and cold. The weather had been that way most all the week. The crews had been called for the briefing at about two in the morning. That's the time when they are told what the target is and have the routes outlined to them. While they were being briefed there was a general hum of activity all over the base. Out on the ramp the engineering crews were pre-flighting the ships, running the engines through, making sure of everything. Down in the Squadron area the enlisted men and the officers who were to fly were getting into their leather clothes and climbing into the trucks that were to take them to the briefing. They were nervous but eager.

I had walked out beyond the Engineering shack up to a point on the rise of the hill where I could watch them come racing down the runway. From there I could see most of the perimeter and the planes taxiing out onto the strip in single file. They halted at the head of the runway, their props spinning, waiting for the signal. My watch said 6:35 a. m. The day was already bright and clear.

Suddenly the engines roared and down the runway past me the first one came. Racing along he zoomed to the far end of the field on my left where he lifted ponderously, taking that belly-full of explosives off the ground, rising steadily to the west, sloping his wing as he curved, rising still, to the south around the field. By the time he had lifted from the ground the second ship was already streaking past me. And then another and another. Until, at last, all the ships of the Group had gone down the runway, following each other on the curve to the south to make up their formation. I looked at my watch. It was 6:50. There was hardly a sound from anywhere in the base. At the empty dispersal areas little knots of engineers and armorers stood smoking and talking in the morning sunlight. Now and then they cast little reflective glances to the sky. But there was nothing up there. Not even the drone of engines. Just calm and peace. Like a peacetime world.

Along about ten-thirty in the morning we looked up at the sky again. There was an engine sound again. The planes weren't expected back until eleven-thirty and so everyone looked up a little apprehensively to find the lone plane. It came in from the east and brought with it a feathered propeller. The ship came in over the field, three engines running along and the black stick of the feathered prop standing out like a sore thumb. One of the twenty-three that had gone out. It

turned out to be the 350th too. Lieutenant Hollenbeck had made the North Sea all right and then, as the formation had gone into a large cloud bank, had lost them and emerged all by himself from the other end of the cloud. So Hollenbeck, disgusted, wheeled around and came back home. Everyone went back to waiting again.

Then the word went around again. This time they were on their way back. So began the long trek to the line from all the sites. Men came from the kitchens from the offices, and machine shops and from their beds to see them come home. They gathered along the runway and in little nervous groups beside the trees, their eyes scanning the skies for the first sight of them. Finally along about 11:15 we could see them. In formation coming up out of the northeast. Everyone was relieved and curious. Relieved that they had come back, curious to know what had happened. Each man headed for the dispersal that would receive his favorite plane or his favorite crew to get the story first-hand.

In an orderly file they peeled off the formation, dropping down to the ground in that peculiar inclining that suddenly levels off and becomes a smooth, easy landing. One-two-three, and so on, each man's eyes pinned to the tail assembly of each plane to read the number off and see whose plane was roaring past. They either saw what they wanted to see and smiled in relaxation or their faces frowned and they turned quickly to the next one.

All the 350th came home and settled down for the night. The ground men gathered around the ships and asked their quick questions of airmen who were tired and irritable and had all the little jobs still to be done, like cleaning out their guns before they could leave the ship. And when these had been done, they were loaded into trucks and whisked off to the Intelligence rooms for their interrogation period, where officers of Intelligence asked them questions regarding the flight, the weather conditions and all the rest. And finally the most important of all. Did they get the target? The answer after the first mission was "no". Everyone felt a little cheated. The first mission was a failure. All that hard work! But they had had the triumph of everyone getting back safe and sound. That was something!

There were a lot of stories after the first mission. They said that Paul Vrabec shot down a German plane. He could see the plane spinning down and the smoke pouring up from her. Others claimed they dropped their bombs on a convoy in the North Sea and they could swear to the sinking of several boats and starting a fire on another one. The ground men just went on getting ready for the next one. No one had long to wait. They went out on another one the very next day.

And so the whole long, intricate process started all over again. This business of getting ready for a mission. The Engineers worked through the day after the planes had come back for their duty, worked to tighten the nuts and bolts, the turnbuckles and the connections. Cleaned out the sumps and checked the plugs and the cylinders for the proper clearance. They listened patiently to the complaints of the pilot and the comments of the crew; they checked and rechecked the engine that they said ran a little rough and uneven. They checked the little buckets of the superchargers and went through the plane, thoroughly and painstakingly. The oxygen bottles had to be right and proper; the electrical lines had to be just so. When the ship was 30,000 feet over the flat anonymity of Europe there was no time for readjustments, no time for replacements.

The communications men whirled around the perimeter in their jeeps and went from plane to plane and checked, too. They checked the lines of the interphone to make sure that the pilot could be heard by the tail gunner and all the other stations between them. They checked the radio, to make sure it would send out its impulses as well as receive them. They checked the radio compass and the little bits and segments of secret equipment that was in the stage of trial and error. They made sure.

The Armorers trundled out to the line in their weapons carrier and went to work on the guns. On the tail gun and the waist guns and the turrets and the sky-



pointing guns that stuck out of the ships. They swung the ball-turret around, making sure it would swing at the proper moment, with the proper degree. They took the guns apart, looked over the parts, making sure. There was no time for a jammed gun over the coast of France in June 1943.

The Ordnance men went through the bomb-bays of each ship, checking the shackles on the walls of the bay, making sure that they were not damaged or out of kilter, making sure they would hold the loaded bombs firmly in place, and then, when the signal was given, would spring open their jaws to cast out the bombs to smash their way down through a French sky on the U-boat pens somewhere on the coast. They worked around their bomb dump and met the long stringing lines of motor trucks as they came onto the field with their carryalls loaded with unfused bombs for the Fortress Europe.

The ground men did all of these things. They worked through the day and when finally they were satisfied and finished they came back to the barracks and the huts and lay down on their bunks and waited. They wrote letters and waited for letters, listened to their radios which they had managed to fix to work on the strange current of the English system. They read or played a quiet small game of cards or just napped.

And when night came on and the alert for the next day's mission was received they waited some more. The Ordnance men and the Armorers waited around through the early part of the evening for the call that would take them out in the middle of the night, this time to load the bombs on the ships. Finally about ten o'clock or so it would come and they would climb down off their beds, climb on their strange trucks and go roaring to the line where they would work for the rest of the night hauling the bombs out to each of the Squadron's ships, hauling the bombs out on their old, toothed trailers, sitting easily and preoccupied on the crest of the pile of explosive. It was the Ordnance men who got the bombs from the dump and brought them to the belly of the plane. It was the Armorers' job to take them and help load them, straining up into the bomb bay, pinning them in with the shackles, making them fast.

And finally along in the early hours of the morning the call would come down to the Charge of Quarters to go up from the Orderly Room and rouse the sleeping Engineers. He would go through the barracks, calling this one and that, from the list of names they had phoned down. The men whose ships were flying. He'd call them. They'd stir and get up in the chill of the June morning, bundling into their great leather, tece-lined work clothes and go clumping and stamping out to the trucks.

While this last phase was being played out on the line, the crews were being wakened in the area. They too were climbing into their leather clothes, climbing into their electrically-heated coveralls, getting ready for briefing and breakfast and the take-off for this the second, mission. Only when the first reverberating roars of the taxiing takeoff came thundering over the sugar beet fields from the direction of the line did this cycle of preparation come to a pause. Once the ships had left in the bright, dazling sun of the morning, only then did the linesmen, the ground men, come back early from their jobs out there and sink into their beds for the hours that lay between now and the time the planes were due back. A sort of silence and peace came down over the field as they slept through the morning. A silence broken only with the summoning throaty hum of their coming back came rolling over the soft, tired hills of Norfolk. The call that brought them out of their beds and along the arrow roads out to the line where they gathered at the dispersal areas to wait and receive their ships back again. So would start the whole pattern of preparation over again. This was the end to which they had been trained and were bound together. These were the first days of many to come, days without variation, without change. Just work. In cold and wet, warmth

## ***They Never Had It So Good . . .***

and chill. On ordinary days and birthdays and wedding anniversaries and the special kinds of days when men shouldn't have to work, days like Christmas, the Fourth of July, days when fatigue rose between them and the job like a forbidding screen. But they were to do their job regardless. This was only the beginning.

### **II**

On the morning of the 26th the second mission was set and the ships went off. This time they were after a factory deep in the heart of German-occupied France. Twenty-two ships went out at three in the afternoon and twenty-two ships came back at nine that night. They had failed again. They hadn't even reached the target. The whole field met them again and this time the Armorers and the Ordnance men had to unload the bombs which had not been dropped. There was talk that they hadn't had a big enough gas load. Others talked of flak and opposition from the Luftwaffe. But it was a wash-out and the crews went through all the Intelligence rigmarole again and then went back to the area and to bed.

Sergeant Kirn arrived back from the Scottish hospital on this day, too. Kirn hated England as passionately as he had hated Walla Walla, Wendover, or any of the other places he had been stationed. When he stared in with a concentrated wail about weather and general annoyance the men knew that Kirn was okeh. He had recovered. He was home again. Sergeant Peterson stepped back and handed over the control to the top man. Gracefully.

Before the crews could even get to the briefing room the next morning the mission was cancelled, scrubbed. The Ordnance men and the Armorers, who had just gotten to bed, got up again and went out to the slips to take the bombs all off again.

The air crews were nervous and jittery. Phil Ong leaned out of the barracks window and took a pot shot at a passing rabbit. As a result he lost his carbine and his good repute for a little while. There were rumors of reorganization and the airmen said that the formations they had to fly were bad, like committing suicide. Everything was very unsatisfactory. Two mission and two failures. Not much of a record.

On the morning of the 28th the crews were set to take off at 9:30. But, though they were all in their ships all around the perimeter, things happened somewhere and the time dragged. Finally at 11:40 they managed to get off the ground. In the first ship, Hells Bells, were Major Cleven and Captain Mark Carnell. In the bomb bay of each ship was a cluster of two-thousand-pounders. Twenty-one ships in all. The target this time was the deadly submarine pens at St. Nazaire. The Major came roaring down the long runway and lifted the ponderous ship with its load. He was leading the Group. One by one they followed him down the runway and rose with that gentle straining motion, sailing up and out over the woods at the western end of the field.

The whole take-off took just twenty minutes and at 12:10 they sailed over the field in formation. Almost directly over the EM Mess Hall they were joined by the formations of the 95th Bomb Group from Horum who guided themselves into place on the spasmodic bursts of the flares from the lead ship. Then with an earth-pulsing roar they made a great circle and headed out toward the coast, the sea, and St. Nazaire.

The old quiet and tight peace of the afternoon came down again. That suspension that came on when the ships were out on a job. Then, as the afternoon drew on, the tension mounted. There was a sort of anticipation in the air. The men of the field began an odd sort of infiltration out to the perimeter. Straggling along in ones and twos to take up their waiting position. Some came by jeep. Others by truck. Some came on their bicycles and some just walked across the face of the camp. Two planes came up out of the southeast with flared props but they

belonged to the 418th and they brought no word back. The waiting went on into the evening.

A little knot from the Squadron sat in the hay field out beyond the Engineering shack. There were Varian and Tienken. And Hays and McMillion, Leypoldt and Kirn. And a lot of others. Perhaps, the Major's leading the group had something to do with it. Perhaps. But nevertheless they were all there, scattered around the perimeter's three miles, waiting and wondering. The wind blew in from the west with a cutting edge. The men hunched themselves down behind the haystacks and talked quietly among themselves.

About ten-thirty in the late afternoon dusk someone saw them coming. Coming up out of the southeast in a long straggling line that became a formation as they approached the field. Eyes were turned upwards, counting the number of the ships in the formation. Then a sigh, great and collective, went up. They were all there. And yet—wait. Not all. One was missing! As they levelled off and came down to the field, skimming in over the village of Thorpe Abbott the men realized that the ship missing was Captain Carey's. Little, doughty, Dick Carey, the Major's boy. Carey who had been angry and annoyed, hurt just a little, because he hadn't been allowed to fly on the other two missions. This, his first, and missing.

The men made a bee-line down to the Major's ship. There, around the nose of Hells Bells, were his men. Cooks and KP's, AM's and Armorers, Ordnance and the clerks. And the Mexican boys who spoke such a little English and seemed so little interested in the things that went on about them. They were all there to greet him. Major Eagen and Major Veal and the field's high ranking men. Flyers, ground men, everyone. From the top to the bottom they were there to welcome the Major back.

Cleven leaned out of the pilot's compartment above their heads and grinned that quick smile.

"D'ja hit it?" someone called.

"Of course! Right on the nose!" The Major laughed, making the sign with his thumb and forefinger, a complete clean circle.

"Did you see it, how'd it look?" someone else called.

The Major gave a quick little nod and grinned. "Pretty," he said. Somehow the Major didn't seem too upset about Carey. No one mentioned it. But—did he know?

The Major knew. And he *was* worried. He paced around the Orderly Room for an hour after the interrogations were done.

"Where in the devil is he?" He'd stop and glare across the room at a clerk or at his chum Varian. They'd stare at him and then drop their eyes and go on with their work. He'd sweep on, not waiting for an answer, go on asking answerless questions, making rude and irritated comment. There had been no fighter opposition on the trip. There had been some flak though, and the ships had a couple of nice holes in them to bear witness. But there had been no casualties—aside from Carey and his crew—and the mission was a success. It was the new step system of formation that did it, they said. The Germans were confused. But Carey was missing and to hell with the Germans.

The Major walked outside along the field and tried to remember about Carey and what could have happened to him. This was the first casualty of the Squadron and the Major didn't like it. Now and then one of the kids would come along the road on a bike or just walking or he'd stop a jeep.

"Hi, Major," he'd say. "Any news?"

The Major would toss up a hand disparagingly. "Naw." And he'd go on walking. The kid would hesitate for a moment as though there were something



else. But then he'd go. Somehow the Major didn't look as though he wanted to say much.

Suddenly the phone rang. Carey was okeh!

"Captain Carey's all right, Major," they told him. He stopped and looked at them and didn't say anything.

"That's right, sir." They swallowed. "He ran out of gas."

Cleven closed his eyes.

"He ran out of gas and landed down in southern England somewhere. He's coming in now."

Cleven climbed in the jeep and tore out to the perimeter. He sat there by himself beside the dispersal as Carey pulled the ship in. Carey swung himself down out of the nose and walked grinning over to the jeep.

"Hi—Major," Carey said.

The Major looked at him for a moment and then pulled the jeep out of the dispersal and drove Carey to the interrogation room himself.

### III

The ships made an abortive attempt to reach LeBourget Airdrome outside of Paris on the 29th, but the weather and the Germans were too thick. So they came on back—with their bombs again.

The next day the Armorers and Ordnance men went into the "put it on—take it off" routine again. Mission scrubbed.

On the days when there was no mission scheduled or days when it had been scrubbed early enough the planes did go up. They went on practice missions and circled around Norfolk county in their formations, getting the feel and brushing up on their business. Some of them would load practice bombs and go off towards the Wash up north where they would practice bombing runs on the target that had been set up in the middle of the waterway.

The first 4th of July away from home came and with it good weather. The ships were ready to go and the crews seemed to feel they should contribute something to the celebration. The target was La Pallice, the French port where the Nazis had some submarine pens for refitting subs after their raids on the Atlantic shipping. It was a long run and the Forts' normal capacity for gasoline was somewhat limited, especially when they were carrying a full load of bombs. So the refuelling men fitted on the Tokio tanks this time as well.

The Tokio tanks, developed originally for the long-range bombing of Tokio, fitted to the ships and with this added reserve they were able to increase their range most effectively.

It was a long flight this time, lasting for some ten hours. The Fourth passed tedious and long. It wasn't much like the Fourth of July of other times. The still quiet English countryside was in violent contrast to the traditional popping and banging of the American scene. The Engineers, tired after their work in getting the planes off on the mission, spent the day in bed.

About five in the afternoon the sky was suddenly filled with ships and the personnel made for the line again. This time they found that good news and success had crowned their efforts. The planes came back without their bombs and the tales of a terrific beating given the French port made them feel happy and good. Photographs later showed direct hits across the spit of land extending out into the sea and later in the month some of the men who went to London on 48-hour passes saw newsreels of the work on La Pallice. It was a good job, better because there were no casualties at all. There had been a light bit of flak as they had neared the target but the enemy held back their fighter force and the planes showed very little damage.

After six days of indecision, bad weather, the eternal putting on and taking off of bombs for raids that never materialized, the crews finally got themselves ready

for another sortie on the morning of the 10th. This was to be LeBourget again, just outside of Paris and the start was very early in the morning. They left the ground around five-thirty, and headed for the French coast. They were gone only for a little while when two ships came back over the field, each with a feathered prop. The men on the ground eyed them distastefully and tried to make out the numbers on their tails as they circled the field. It didn't look so good. Their returning so early. And yet—maybe it was mechanical trouble.

About ten o'clock the bulk of the Group came back and the anxious eyes counted the total. One was missing.

To the little group that had assembled again in the hay field and watched them come in slowly there was a grimness in the silence. The Major had flown on this mission too and they watched and waited for the planes to speed past them. The 418th came in and then the 349th and then at last the 350th. Six planes from the Squadron had left for the mission. The waist gunners waved from their open windows as the planes wheeled by. There was DeSanders and his crew back. Then 62 with Claytor and his crew. Old Duration Plus Six was back. Then Scott and the Major—thank heavens! Then Helstrom and his crew. The eyes looked up from the runway and around the skies. Then the men looked at each other. One was missing. Number 50—Judy—that was Lieutenant Duncan and his crew. The rest of the Group went on landing in precise rhythmic order. But one of the 350th was gone. Charles Duncan and crew had not returned. The little group in the field broke up and made for the planes.

They hadn't hit the target again. They hadn't even gotten to it. For this time as they reached the coast of France, they were met with a blast from the enemy. Both flak and fighters. The Group had proceeded fairly well as a formation until they began to enter France and then the attack mounted. Some of the ships aborted and turned back to the channel until at length the whole Group felt it necessary to turn back with their bomb load. Guns from the Forts spat back at the enemy. Here and there looked as though a hit was made. Suddenly the plane Judy appeared to be in trouble. Flying on the Major's left wing Duncan appeared to have been hit somewhere near the nose of the ship and the giant bomber began to lose altitude. Other men in the formation tried to follow his course as he left the formation and headed down towards French soil. Several of the crew were thought to have bailed out, tiny specks shooting from the body of the ship, white parachutes blossoming as they opened. By this time the formation had moved on and the progress of the stricken ship was lost to view. They came on back home. And left Judy behind.

Duncan had been the pilot. Robertson the co-pilot with Chiesel and Forbes as bombardier and navigator. The enlisted men were De los Santos, Oliver, who had been a substitution for the day, Frank, Hanover who had been the first man to be awarded the Purple Heart in the Squadron for injuries sustained on the first mission, and youngish, blond Parish Reynolds, who had literally begged to be allowed to make the flight. All of them left behind on the ship's fourth mission.

Duncan's crew was the first battle casualty, and, aside from the crash that had claimed the lives of Paul Capaccio's crew back in Nebraska, the first loss we had sustained. The feelings of the unit were stunned and low. The clerical forces in the Squadron went back to the area and began the business of collecting the belongings of the men who hadn't come back and stored them away in the Supply room to wait for the twenty-day period to pass. Twenty days in which they waited to see if some sort of word might come from those missing. At the end of those twenty days "missing" would be dropped and the word "gone" would be in the minds. The men would be believed prisoner. Maybe even worse than that. The adjutant and the supply officer, along with some of the enlisted men, collected the belongings, made up the records, and, in the midst of it all, a telephone call came from Wing

Headquarters to announce that Hanover could come and get his Purple Heart. But he was MIA.

The rest of the Squadron tried to dismiss the whole thing with a sort of "c'est la Guerre" attitude, "that's the way it goes" view, but they would find themselves remembering the first crew for a long time to come. The MIA column in the Morning Report had its first entry. A quiet, grim little entry and the total was ten—four officers and six enlisted men.

July 14th, Bastille Day for the French, and LeBourget all over again. Someone up above was determined that LeBourget get it. This was the third attempt. The crews listened to their briefing instructions and remembered Duncan and the crew over there across the channel. They listened, remembering, resolving to get there this time or else.

Off they went in the early morning hours to carry to France the Bastille Message from the Allies. They joined up with the other Groups heading over Eastern England and set out across the channel into northern France heading for Paris. The same thing happened this time as had happened four days previously. Heavy flak and, as they neared the capital, the heaviest concentration of enemy fighters since they had begun their operational flying.

Up the Germans came in swarms from Amiens and from LeBourget itself. The enemy, knowing that the target was their reserve stock for defense against France and their defense against the repair depots around Paris, threw up an intense curtain of flak around the city.

"You coulda walked in on it!" one of the men later said.

The enemy fighters came pounding down from the skies, posing off in the distance as if to mark the oncoming formations of slower-moving planes, making out the vulnerable spots. Then, with a whining scream, they'd fall down on them, coming straight at the formation, fearlessly, almost as though they were going to run head-on, before they'd heel over and pass by, their guns and cannon spluttering fire and shell. One minute there'd be nothing out there. Then they'd come in from all sides. A clear and open sky with a little speck of a Focke-Wulf on the distant horizon and then suddenly, racing at them was the spitting, wing-blazing little plane with the yellow nose ripping the fuselage of the Fort with sharp deadly steel. Some of the Germans defied the normal sense of distance and came in so close to the creeping bombers that the men could have read a newspaper, had it been plastered on the sides and bottom of the German fighter.

The crews stuck to their guns and fought to return every round of fire as it was given. Here and there a German plane came screaming up beside the B-17 and then poised there beside the ship, as though undecided which way to go. And, effortlessly, without warning, a thin little stream of greyish smoke would start seeping through the engine cowlings and the fighter would tip lightly and start veering off, downward. The men in the bombers tried to follow the course. To see if this was a hit or another trick in the German grab-bag. But most of the time there was no way of seeing the thing actually hit the ground and their claims later became "supposes" which were marked up as probables. But not definite. For by the time they had marked the course, there'd be another fighter there and the whole thing would go on all over again.

Phil Ong on Lieutenant Braley's crew was nicked by a small piece of 20 mm shell as it came crashing into his ball turret and this was Purple Heart material. Charles Bailey, flying with Lieutenant Claytor, nearly claimed more than the Purple Heart. For he manned the waist gun, almost steadily firing out the little window, and a stray bullet from a fighter came plowing up through the interior of the plane and passed through his leather jacket. Bullets seemed to be everywhere. Joe McGuire nearly got it when three bullets literally pinned him to the wall of the radio room. One went through his legs to lodge in the wall. The other zinged past



his head into the wall, and the third struck the floor near his feet. But McGuire had some shooting to do himself. It was not until the fight was over and done with that he found out how close it had been.

They fought their way into the target this time and dropped their bombs. Criss-crossing the field with pock-marks of destruction. Leaning from the window of his waist-gun position Steve Kopczewski tried to see the damage from his plane, Duration Plus Six.

"Man, it was terrific," he said later, after they had gotten back. "We blasted hell out of them this time." He grinned with satisfaction.

They came back out of the hot spot, flying over the channel, up through the eastern portions of England. They came back home to the "paddlefeet" who waited on the ground, taut and strained, waiting for the story. This time the count was good. For all of the fire and shell everyone was home safely. They had marked the day of French Independence very well indeed. Herman Goering's yellow-nosed fighters had known that they were there, too!

Life went on from day to day. Though this was only the fourth mission it seemed as though the Squadron had been doing this sort of thing for a long, long time. There was an age that came up over men working like this. They were doing a job. A long, hard, bitter job. Whether it was in the kitchen, on the salvage pile, flying the big ones, or typing. They were all in it and in it together: the fights over France against Goering's Luftwaffe, the pock-marks across LeBourget were all their handiwork. They knew this, felt it, and were proud and eager and tired. It was only the beginning.

#### IV

I had wanted to keep this story mainly about the ground personnel when I told it. Because, somehow, the airmen have had their praises sung for a long time. And rightly so. But theirs is the heroic tale. The glamorous and exciting life. They are the men with the decorations, the men whom Fate placed in the position for greatness. They are the ones whose great deeds have been recorded and are known and are admired and will live on for the age to come. But the ground man is different. His was the life of drudgery and routine. The same in the beginning of the war and the same as the war came to a close. He followed an outlined course and did his work; he watched the others come and go and saw their medals and heard their stories; he went on working just the same. He was not a heroic man, not in the sense of fire and glory. But he was heroic in his way. He was the kid who worked in the butcher shop or the grocery store or went to school in 1941. He was the man who had a wife and maybe a kid or two and was just getting started and was comfortable and pleased and solid on that Sunday in December 1941. He was the older man, too old to fly if he wanted to, a little too old for a lot of things. But he went into the Air Force, perhaps by choice, perhaps because that's where he wound up. He went off to some field in the countryside of England and had a job to do and did it. He was not glamorous. There's nothing much glamorous about working behind the serving line of a mess hall. But someone had to do it. Nothing glamorous about driving Majors and Colonels around in a jeep at their bidding. But someone had to do it. Nothing glamorous about putting bombs on airplanes or taking them off all through the long winter nights of a bitter English winter. But they had to be there when the bombardier pressed the toggle switch over a German city.

No. There was nothing glamorous about working all through the day and night on a broken oil line or a plugged-up oil sump. Nothing much of glamor in shoveling the snow from the runways so that the ships could take off on schedule to strike at Hitler again. Nothing glamorous in that.

Nothing exciting nor outstanding nor medal-winning in digging drainage ditches or typing reports or sweeping streets or cleaning latrines or building fires

or sitting all night by a telephone in case the Germans came. Nothing to mention in dispatches in cutting grass or building shipping crates or filing charts or oiling barracks floors or counting blouses and pants or picking up the effects of the men who had gone down that day. Nothing in all of this that wound up with decorations before a full dress review. The newsreels wouldn't want this; it wasn't newsworthy. What was so remarkable in a bunch of men, from all corners of the States, young and old, smart and dull, trained and untrained, working together on the jobs that kept the whole thing going. Nothing much. At least, not until you look at it squarely. And then you know.

You know suddenly that all the bombs that fell on Europe and on the other places were loaded by ordinary men. You know that all the ships that flew on record flights over uncharted and unbelievable places were maintained by ordinary men. That all the food for and all the living that was done by heroes was maintained and safeguarded and carried on by ordinary men. Brothers and husbands and sons. And you realize suddenly that each Distinguished Flying Cross was won by many men. That every Air Medal was made possible by hundreds of men. That every Purple Heart was felt by lots of men. And that every missing man or dead man was missed and mourned by ordinary men.

I wish there was a way to tell the whole story of the ground men. More than the air. Because they built the supports that held the heavens in place and filled them with strength and power. They went on just working, doing what they had to, through all their grumbling and their alleged discontent. They did it no less proudly and as effectively as the men who flew the big ones. They worked in routine, in discomfort, long and hard. They were ordinary men come together to do a job. There is nothing that is newsworthy nor glamorous nor exciting in men who come together to do a job.

And so, in the pages that are yet to come, there will be told the story of the airman, rightly so. Because his story is the story of the whole. It was for this purpose that we were trained. And yet, in every bomb that drops, in every ship that flies, in every triumph, every defeat, there is the irrevocable mark of the man on the ground. The man who stayed behind and sweated out each mission. The worker. The ordinary man. The glorious things the Major did and accomplished are because that ground man accomplished his duties before and after, and in the pages that record these happenings they all stand together, to people like me who knew and loved them well, equal in their achievements, dependent on each other. And I think they knew it all along.

## V

There came a period between missions. It happened like this. There was a period of furious activity and then a period in which nothing happened. Since the 10th there had been no activity. Even at night there was nothing. When we had arrived at Thorpe Abbott the nights had been full enough. Overhead in the blackness you could hear the almost constant thrumming of the British as the RAF went over to blast at the Ruhr or to belabor Cologne and through the early morning hours you could hear them coming back. Detached, here and there. Those who went about their work in the night could see the skies pierced with the white beam of the searchlights as they twisted and turned in the skies seeking out the ever-possible enemy. Helping their own ships to come and go as well. There were unsubstantiated tales of near-by bombings and flares being dropped for parachutists or for photo work by the enemy. But towards the middle of July there were none of these even. Things were very quiet and the war seemed far away. Even farther away than it had seemed in Kearney. And yet a hundred miles isn't so far away.

On the afternoon of the 16th, a lazy sunny warm afternoon, an accident occurred. Not to a plane of the Squadron, though. The ships had been taking off on a practice mission. As they came down the runway one plane seemed to leave

the ground a second too soon. Perhaps he tried to get off the ground too soon. Perhaps it was mechanical. The plane suddenly veered off to the right when two engines failed. The men standing around the perimeter stared horrified. Down the plane crashed into a small ravine about a mile from the perimeter track. If the pilot had been lucky he might have made the landing in the small clearing. But heavy with gasoline the ship crashed into a small wood and wrapped itself in a twisted, gnarled mass around the slender trees. Fire broke out and while a few of the crew were rescued from the inferno the majority of them died in the flames. There was nothing after the first few moments except a charred hulk of scrap metal. This was the first crash on a Group station since the activation the previous October. A thick column of black spiraling smoke could be seen for miles. A marker for death.

Quick action on the part of Dick Hawkins, an Armorer, resulted in the saving of one of the men from the flames, for which Dick was awarded the Soldier's Medal.

The war goes on. The next morning Sergeant Hale, along with Joe Vassar and Joe Dombroski of the Squadron Operations department, roused the crews and saw that they got up to the briefing room. It was another early morning mission and in a different direction this time. Instead of heading in the usual southeast they headed almost due north and out over the North Sea. This was the most important mission yet scheduled and on the success of the mission depended a great deal that would determine future bombing schedules of the Force. They headed out over the North Sea with a plan of action that would carry them down from the Sea into Germany itself in a deeper penetration than had ever before been attempted. They waited and watched, the men back on the field, to see what would come now.

The planes flew up over the northern coast and out over the North Sea. It was a good flying day over England but as they approached the German coast the weather grew thick and heavy. Penetration seemed difficult and for a time they eyed the weather with misgivings. The farther they went, the worse it got. The 94th Group was flying the high element and the 100th took the lower. The armada cruised along towards the Reich.

But the Germans were not to be caught napping. Up from the German coast came a swarm of yellow-nose fighters who mounted high in the clouds and sat there, waiting for the on-coming Forts. It must be pointed out that there was no fighter plane protection for our ships at all at this time. The Forts were strictly on their own. It was not until 1944 that fighter planes and protection in any strength were afforded the bomber fleets. Off in the distance the watchful men at their turrets and windows caught sight of a number of heavier JU-88's poised on the rim of the cloudbanks, watching and waiting. Suddenly, as if on a given signal, the attack began. Dropping like plummets from above, the fighters wheeled and zoomed, coming in strong from the tails of the upper elements, savagely whipping and blasting. The gunners gave as good as they got, their guns blazing from tail, from waist and from the turret positions. The fighters repeated their assault. Now and then a Fort was forced lower, dropping out of the high element, losing altitude only to find a small measure of safety in the lower element. Now and then the men in the Forts saw one of their own number dropping clear of the formation, leaving for a landing somewhere. They could see the bloom of the chutes as they opened with the men who had evacuated the stricken ship. The 350th moved along steadily in the low element. Though they were part of the formation their protection was in their flying position, untenable to the Germans, and they were untouched, except for an occasional passing thrust by a more daring German pilot. Now and then splotches of flak fire dimpled against the sky—harmless little snoods of black hanging there, black puffs that were shellfire flinging deadly bits of metal at the ships. Suddenly some of the men saw a new, different mark against the face of the sky. An almost blood-red splotch. They looked again. It dawned on them that



the waiting JU-88's had gone into action. Sitting high above the Fortress fleet, they had begun to drop aerial bombs on the backs of the planes below!

The weather was poor, the attack furious, and nothing was accomplished. They turned around and came back home. There were no losses in the Group though some of the ships were heavily damaged. The 350th was lucky. Little damage and no losses. The men standing around the field felt pretty good about that as they counted them in. It was a week since the loss of Lieutenant Duncan.

## VI

The Trondheim mission of the 24th was perhaps, aside from Regensburg later that fall, the most notable achievement in the Squadron's history during the early months. Certainly it was one of the most spectacular. It was another of those early morning flights. Once again the Tokio tanks went on and they were filled to capacity. The crews were awakened at two, and in the briefing rooms at four. The target was Trondheim away up on the western coast of Norway, Nazi-occupied Quisling-ruled Norway. It was to be a long, tiresome flight, for the crews were set for a flying time of over eleven hours. This represented an accumulated time of constant flying that even exceeded the time involved in the crossing of the Atlantic. The ships were scheduled to take off at eight. But before the arrangements had been completed it was eight-thirty. At eight-forty they roared down the runway and took off into a low fog-blanketed sky. Flying very low over the field they made several circling trips while the formations were made up and then they headed to the North and to Norway.

Flying high above the clouds they went out over the North Sea, gradually edging their way up along the Norwegian coast. There was no opposition from the enemy during the early portion of the morning. However, about noontime they crossed the Norwegian coast and just before they caught actual sight of the mountainous land they found they were not entirely alone. For off in the distance there loomed the outlines of about fifteen enemy fighters. Most of them appeared to be FW 190's at first and yet, as they drew a little closer, a little more curious, the men thought them to be ME 109's. Little fast grey ships capable of a lot of destruction if they chose to make a fight of it. But they seemed content to sit outside the fire range, to wait to see what the Americans were up to. The planes crossed the coast line and came on up steadily northwards crossing the snow-covered peaks, watching the silent ominous land below them. Now and then they passed an airfield and a curtain of flak rose up to meet them. This was a different technique of flak from the kind they had experienced on the coast of France. For this was neither above nor below them, but was instead aimed with a deadly accuracy. More than once onlookers in the planes thought that one of their number was going to catch one of the bursts on a vulnerable wingtip. But Fortune continued to smile. For the formation flew on through the clouds and came to the port of Trondheim.

Trondheim was a valuable target, for there was much shipping. There was no doubt from the maps of the area that there was a heavy concentration of repair facilities and military installations located around the ear-cup shell of the harbor. The Nazis also feared a bombing of the port, too, for long before the Forts arrived over the target there was set off in the recesses of the port a great smoke screen that covered the whole harbor. In fact, when they arrived, the smoke was so dense that many of the men thought that the other wing had already come in and bombed the place and a feeling of confusion as to which was the true target stuck in their minds. But they figured out the ruse and at about two in the afternoon they unloaded their bombs directly over the target, scoring a magnificent concentration hit, devastating damage, and though they did not know it, a bold strike that cut the Nazis from some very important work.

Coming back from the target the men observed the buildings of several newly-constructed airports and from these and similar installations came the thick, accurate barrage of flak. Many of the ships suffered slight damage. A couple of them even had their plexiglass noses blown in. But aside from a few lightly bumped heads and narrow creases, there was no serious damage.

All this while the little band of German fighters stuck to the formation, always sitting just outside the firing range, yet sticking doggedly until a possible opening might occur. But the opening never materialized. They tried a light feint once but never dared come right out in the open into the withering fire of the formation. Hitler's Norway defenders were not as courageous as his French defenders.

One of the Forts became crippled by engine trouble and lagged behind the formation, flying low over the sea all the way back to the base. He was constantly dogged by a lone grey pursuit job who followed him but never quite dared for the knockout blow. He hung behind about two hundred yards out of the fire range while the guns of the whole crew blazed merrily at him. But he stuck.

"I sure admire his courage," Charles Mayville, one of the gunners, said later.

They came into the interrogation room after they got back.

"My rear end is mighty tired!" Lieutenant Claytor grinned and then his face lit up. "Those bombs were sure in. It was a lovely thing to see."

They all agreed with him. It had been a long, long flight and they were all very tired when they came in about eight that night. But they had laid the bombs on the target and that was all that seemed to matter. The men who had stayed behind on the ground were glad, too.

"Boy, this war's serious." It was Lieutenant Scott. "I could hear those bursts going hrumph-hrumph every time they went off. I don't care much for that kind of stuff." Scott's hands shook as he drank his coffee.

Languid, nerveless Jerry Ferroggiaro, though, he just sat there and eyed Scott. One leg dangled over the arm of his chair.

"Wasn't much," he said quietly. "We didn't see much. Old B. I., though (B. I. Smith, a gunner) Old B. I. now, he shot one down. I saw him hit it and I followed that jerry down until he hit the water with a heluva burst."

The others corroborated the story. B. I. had hit it, they saw it veer off and the smoke pouring out of the engine and they saw it hit the water.

Harry Calhoun got started on the target.

"They sure laid that smoke screen down. Why, after we'd left the target you could still see a column of smoke rising about 20,000 feet high and it was still going strong."

Littly curly-headed Albert Freitas shrugged and smiled.

"I had fun," he said quietly. "I hate the flak, though. Gives me the jitters. What I like is lots of fighters. Hope we get 'em one of these days."

And so it went through the night. They talked about the raid and the results of the raid and what had happened and whether it was as bad as it had been through the raids on LeBourget and on La Pallice and they grunted with fatigue after the long flight.

"One more hour and we could have collected Per Diem," Paul Vrabec sighed. They talked it all over and the men on the ground who had waited for them sweated out the bull sessions and gathered the story as it was told and pieced together. There was one point on which they all seemed to agree. Jerry said it.

"That Major's a good boy to fly with." He watched the Major stalk from the interrogation room as he said it. "Yessir . . ." he said thoughtfully. "He's okeh, the Old Man is."

The flying men slept heavily and fitfully as the ground men went about patching up the holes in the fuselage and getting the ships ready for the next call. It was for the following morning.

The crews groaned at the mention of it. You could hardly blame them after the long flight of the day previous. But . . . this was war. So they got up and went to the briefing and found out where they were going this time. Warnemunde, on the shores of the North Sea in Germany . . . on the other side of Denmark.

Warnemunde. Experimental station for the German men of science.

The planes were loaded up and the Tokios filled again. They got off the ground at twelve-thirty, circled the field and struck out over the North Sea towards Denmark.

Nothing much happened until they were opposite Hamburg, when a small cluster of fighters appeared out of the horizon to meet them. The Forts feinted and turned toward the Hamburg area and then twisted their course suddenly and straightened, made up and across the protruding arm of occupied Denmark. Once over the Danish countryside they felt the first great flurry of flak and at Flenning, just after they had passed by Schleswig, where a giant smoke screen had been set up by the Germans, several of the planes aborted and turned back for home. But the bulk of the formation struck on across the land and out across the water again. Finally they came over the target. But weather conditions had changed. What was formerly good visibility had dimmed and the target was almost completely obscured by cloud. They turned around and headed back. But coming back they didn't go over the the water and across the Danish peninsula. Instead, the leading Group came along the German north coast, across the important port of Kiel, home of the German navy, and one of the most-heavily fortified centers in the European theatre. Once over the harbor they jettisoned their bombs helter-skelter amid a terrific concentration of flak which ripped and tore through the planes and threatened to capsize the entire Group. But they managed to fight their way out north, crossing over Helgoland to the coast and out over the sea. On the way back they passed a couple of large vessels and a host of armed fishing smacks but the shooting for the day was over.

They came in over the field about seven-thirty in the evening. This time Captain Carey and his crew were missing again. It wasn't just a case of out of gas this time, either. They were down and definitely. They'd been seen plunging into the sea off the German coast. Carey and his co-pilot, Styles, along with the other two officers, DeFevre and Griffith. And the enlisted men Parsons, Berg, Kopczewski, a replacement for the day, and Eddy and Mayville and Lepper. The Squadron had lost the second of the original crews. And in Carey they had lost the likeable, cocky, good-looking Operations officer that had taken over from Kearney.

There were a lot of stories of what had happened to Carey and his ship. Some told of a ship over Kiel in the thick of the flak being battered literally to pieces with the wings blown off and a plunge to earth. Another told of a Fort forced down in the sea, sinking, through an incomplete radio signal received by one of the ships in the formation. There was a story that one ship had been forced to leave the formation and was last seen heading out over the sea towards sanctuary and internment in Sweden. Incidents were seen through individual eyes. The Squadron began to learn that eye-witness accounts during missions were not always accurate.

The Major was hit hard with Carey's loss. He wandered around the interrogation room asking each man, officer and enlisted man, what he had heard. Or seen. He blamed himself. He listened intently to each story hoping to glean some comfort, some hope, from what they had to tell. But there was nothing definite. He looked worried and worn.

"This war's a breeze," he'd said more than once. "Be a breeze if I don't lose Carey."

He went into the refreshment room to ask more questions of the men in there. Each man wanted so much to tell him something good but there just wasn't anything to tell. He finally knew he wouldn't find out anything more that night.



Maybe not for a long, long time. He gathered up his things and went out of the door.

"I don't know why these things happen. You think it's a dry run and everybody's back safe and sound. There's nothing to it. And you come home and find that Carey's gone." He sounded tired and disappointed. In his concern was the concern of the whole unit. Though they could do nothing but see the weariness on his face and the worry in his eyes and hope that he'd find out something definite. Something they could use as a key to the unsolved disappearance.

They kept coming in all evening. All through the dark hours of the morning to ask if there had been any news of Captain Carey and they talked themselves into believing that it generally took several days to really call a man "missing". But the Morning Report was made that night and Carey's name and all the rest went into it as "missing in action", and the total in the missing column went up and came to 20.

Shortly around midnight the British planes began their throbbing trip across the black sky track to Germany for another night's attack. Many a man lay in his bunk in the blackness and his thoughts were mingled.

"Give it to the bastards," was what he was saying to himself. "Make up for Carey and Duncan and all the rest of them. Give 'em something they'll remember." Then a little thought crossed the heart here and there. "Keep the Major safe." With the song of the British bombers, the flutter of the Lancasters and the Halifaxes as they chopped their way east, they went to sleep tired, weary, experienced with war already.

## VII

No word ever came through about Carey. He was gone, definitely. For a year or more we were not to learn about Carey nor any member of his crew.

Carey's disappearance was one that was felt from one end of the field to the other.

He had been named Operations Officer on the formation of the Squadron and held that job throughout the long months since activation. He was meticulously neat and well-ordered, an excellent officer and a good friend.

The boys on the line felt Carey's loss keenly. The spot on the perimeter where Carey's ship had been stationed seemed a bigger hole than it was in the Squadron line of dispersals. The men soon became accustomed to referring to the empty space as the "place where Captain Carey left from." But they felt his absence no more than every other man on the Squadron roster. The Major summed it all up a couple of days later, when sitting in the orderly room, his leg draped over the arm of his chair, he said:

"Carey was sort of like my son."

And Captain Carey was sort of like the Squadron's son. But the days passed and no further word came and the men of the 350th began to avoid mentioning the happening. Not talking about it made the thing seem a little less real. But while it dropped from conversations, it stayed in the minds.

On the lists for erasure from the face of Germany, Oschersleben came next. The crews returned beat up.

"It was a rip-snorting son-of-a-bitch!" one of them said, coming into the Intelligence room.

"They came from all sides," he said. "Must have been over a hundred of those little yellow-nosed bastards. They came tearing down in bunches of twos and threes—and then the larger ones. The JU-88's sat outside the formation and fired .37 mm shells point-blank at us. I saw Forts blow up in formation all over the sky. I counted five of them going down myself. How the hell we ever got back, I'll never know."

That was the story. The ships had left the field about six-thirty in the morning

and after the usual wheeling around the field they were joined to the south by hordes of other 17's. When, about seven o'clock, they came over Thorpe Abbott, there were almost eighty of them, flying along in clumped formation. As they turned to the west to circle again the sunlight in the early morning caught their wings and bodies and made them look like little clay models hung against the deep blue of the early morning sky. They went off to the northeast and that deep calm and silence came down over the field again.

They knew the mission was a tough nut to crack. They were trying for the north German coast again. That meant going over the very spots that had given them trouble before.

Cruising along the North Sea they saw nothing. The weather grew a little thick as they neared the coast and they could see that this was going to prove a little troublesome. The sky was filled with large clouds and they went through them, around them, keeping an eager vigilance against the presence of enemy aircraft. Suddenly, as before, it happened.

Down from the clouds overhead came a veritable cloud of enemy pursuit planes hurling a vicious attack against the planes of the 94th Group just behind the Squadron. The men of our ships saw the little planes as they came ripping through the sky, their guns spattering and spitting and they lashed through the formation with an intense savagery.

Off in the distance about four hundred yards from the formation a group of JU-88's flew lazily alongside, firing cannon shells broadside into the formation. The Major was leading the Squadron and once he thought that he'd lost Lieutenant Helstrom who was at the rear of his ship. One minute he was there . . . the next minute he was gone.

"I saw this little devil coming like the wind," Helstrom explained later. "He barreled out of the sky and proceeded to pump lead straight into my tail. There was nothing I could do but get out, head for a cloud."

So he veered to one side and pushed the Fort for all she was worth, heading for the cloud that would afford him a hiding place until the enemy was shaken. But the pursuit pursued him relentlessly. One more nudge and the Fort slid into the cloudbank.

"That guy wanted to kill me," Helstrom said indignantly.

The battle continued. The Squadron got through all right. But they were not required to take the full brunt of the attack. The 94th Group didn't come out so well. Observers on our ships saw five of their ships go down within the space of fifteen minutes.

"I saw one of the ships go right up in the formation," Freitas said afterwards. "And another one went into a spin, smoking, and the whole right wing was on fire."

"Those enemy planes on top of us, below us, alongside us." Thornton Stringfellow, big, burly, blond, wasn't the kind to get excited without reason. "I never saw so many fighters in my life. They must have had the whole German Air Force out after us this time. It was murder."

For a half-hour it had gone on. The enemy defended their homeland with a vicious and compelling attack and they were successful in their defense for the bombers were forced to jettison their bombs to get rid of them. After staving off complete demolition they came back home, arriving at eleven in the morning, two hours before their scheduled arrival. They had not crossed the German coast. However, vicious as the battle had been, no one had been injured in the Squadron and no one was lost. They had seen what had happened to the others in other Groups, though. There had been moments when they had had the helpless terror of seeing one of their own number falter and waver on the course. But everything had come through all right and they had been able to keep their formation. The fact that they were out over the sea and therefore unmolested by flak as well

as the fighters was a saving grace. But the target escaped the punishment that had been mapped for it. It was saved for another day.

That night they got on their bicycles and went into Harleston or Brockdish and drank beer and flirted with the village damsels. War in the morning—sleep in the afternoon—play at night. A screwy world. 1943.

## VIII

On the fifteenth of August the planes ran an attack on the French industrial area of Merville-Lille. Lieutenant Oscar Amison sat back and stared up at the interrogation room ceiling.

"Guys who say these are 'milk runs' are crazy in the head." He coughed slightly, and ran his hair back off his greasy forehead. Then he spoke again seriously, intently. "Everytime we go out we're risking our necks. Take today's raid, for example. It was a bastard. The flak was terrible, peppered all around us from the minute we hit the coast until we got over the target." He paused at a question. "Fighters?" He wiped his nose with the back of his hand. "No, they didn't bother us much this time. But, as I said, flak is the big trouble. You've no way of knowing when one of those damned little hunks of steel is going to cut through the ship. Nah, every one's a job. There isn't any of this goddam 'milk run' stuff to it."

The ships had left late in the afternoon and were gone about four and a half hours. They cut over the channel, a great force of them, some one hundred and eighty in all. They cut across the enemy coast line near the Belgian port of Ostend, dropping down until they came near Lille and then they let the bombs go. There was little opposition from enemy planes, as Amison had said. The move had been unexpected and the Nazis had been caught red-handed at their airport with their planes on the ground. What few planes had managed to get off the ground and upstairs were content to make a few slight passes at the Forts. But for the most part they stayed outside the firing range. The flak, on the other hand, bumped the Forts up and down and one stray small piece came crashing through the windshield over Lieutenant Scott.

Scott grinned a little shakily. "It's the nearest I ever came to having someone else's initials cut in my forehead," he said and then shook his head. "I don't like this game very much."

The flight was the first made since they had turned the clocks back an hour, and this, plus the late take-off, meant the planes came back in the darkening dusk. There was an obscured moon which was no help and so the ships came in on the "wing and prayer" system. You'd see them off in the distance, their red guiding lights like peering, myopic probing eyes in the night sky, and then they'd start dropping, settling down towards the field. Most of them came in even, barely visible to the watching crews, and others, not so daring, not so sure, momentarily flashed on their landing lights, just to make sure. But they were all careful. Lights on a returning air fleet can guide the enemy raiders in at night.

The morning of the 17th of August was an important day in the war. An important day in the Squadron. For one thing, it marked the first anniversary of the Eighth Air Force as a participating factor in the war. And it was to prove a red-letter day for all time for us.

The crews got up very early and flew away before most of the ground personnel realized it. Everyone went on this one, everyone except Lieutenant Helstrom and his crew, who were left behind to sweat it out with the ground crews.

The mission was charted and arranged and carried out with all secrecy. Those not actively concerned with the actual operation of the mission knew little about it and for hours after the crews had taken off speculation ran high and wide. It was known that the members of the crews had taken extra accommodations with them. Blankets and water. Slowly the news formed. It wasn't definite news. Little stray



bits, bits that, pieced together, began to make sense. Finally most of the men realized that something big had happened. Or was happening. The crews had taken off to bomb an object in Germany and then they were going on somewhere. Not coming back to the base at all. But going on across the continent somewhere to another spot for rest, refuelling and, maybe, reloading. Beyond that they could get nothing. All anyone knew was that they had gone, that they wouldn't be back for a day or two. Everyone just waited on an empty field and wondered. The London papers came out the next day and carried half-verified accounts of a tremendous successful raid deep in the heart of Germany. They spoke of high losses of German fighters and flak. They said the Forts had gone into Bavaria, some fifty miles or so north of Munich, one of the deepest penetrations yet, to a place called Regensburg. Then the planes had gone on to Africa, across the Alps and down the length of Italy to Africa. There was the persistent report of heavy losses, of great air battles with two hundred or more German planes battling in the skies over Bavaria to defend the great factories of Regensburg. But it was all more or less conjecture. The men at the base could get no news from anyone. They wondered and chafed and wondered some more.

## IX

Things went on. The raids into Norway and into Germany, to the French Coast and all, the every day routine of the field moved along. Sometimes good, sometimes bad, always, as the Negro lady said, "awful daily."

Shortly after the first of July as the baseball team was smashing its way to the Group championship, Ben Garber went out on a pass one weekend. He had found a stable along the way to Norwich and went for a ride.

It was a good horse. Ben was a good rider. They sped up and down the English countryside. Finally Ben came to a fence. He gave the horse a free rein and the horse threw him and kicked him in the head. He had a fractured skull. Ben got along pretty well but it was months before he rejoined the Squadron. The ball team lost the first game the night he was operated on.

Al Strain had purchased a British motorcycle from Captain Carnell. Coming down the road from the area he collided with a truck at the intersection and suffered lasting leg injuries, so severe that for a time it looked as though he might be minus a leg. But they saved it, and he came back to the unit, too. Much later.

Recreational facilities got a little better after the unit had been at Thorpe Abbott a few weeks or so. Movies were shown in the old Officers' Club on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. It was a long, narrow room, filled with benches and sweating bodies and the general atmosphere was blue with smoke. The camera, operated by one of the Special Service men, was placed in the center of the aisle and other than frequent flare-ups due to broken film, burnt out lights and disappearing sound tracks, all generally went well. Of course the fact that the officers had the best seats reserved for them didn't matter—much.

The hospital lists grew and fell. Glenn Myers had his interesting operation here and needed little encouragement after it was over to talk, little more to show the scar. John Zinkine had an operation, too, but he was reticent to talk about it. Nugget Bernadac, who had started such a furore when he had dispatched a wire to the chief of the FBI, went off to the hospital at last. He had been trying to go for a long time, since Kearney, and finally he got there and finally we heard that he'd gone home.

Bicycles took their toll. Clifford Starkey, George Rudden, Captain Mark Carnell, who had taken Captain Carey's place as Operations Officer. Lieutenants Kaiser, Claytor and Moffly, Ben Steenwyk. There was Lieutenant Welty who suffered from dandruff and decided to cure it. He shaved his head with a razor. He kept right on applying the electric razor to it from time to time. He was as bare as a billiard ball most of the time. He was weird looking in the early morning. For you'd see him streaking through the

area clad in a pair of virgin-yellow pants, the rest of him nude, including that awesome head!

With the setting up of definite jobs and definite programs a lot of the men went off to various schools on detached service to take specialization courses. People like Lt. Caverly, Leonard Krzywicki, Robert Lester and Glenn Myers, Earl Neville, Ed Matyasovski, and Wilmer Donahue. Donald Strout went off to Navigation school and Wayne Ketchum, Ed Dolezal, and Francis Hartnett went off to communications school.

During July a new crew came in to take the place of the missing Lieutenant Duncan. Led by Lieutenant Thomas Hummel, there was Norman Brewster, Archie Depew, Michael Doroski, who had been in Pearl Harbor at the time of the Jap attack, Gunnar, O'Connor, Meeker, Devich and Williams. A last man, Bishoff, was later removed from the crew for hospitalization and his place taken by a spare gunner. A replacement pilot, Kenneth Menzie, also was added as were two gunners, William Quinn and William Hinton.

The ground force took in several new men and lost a couple of the "old men." Such as Leslie Rowton who was transferred over to Group Headquarters where he had been working since the arrival of the Group in England.

The time was filled with a lot of little odds and ends. This was July and August of 1943. The July of Mussolini's fall and the birth of the fervent but foolish idea that with the surrender of Italy we might be home soon. The July of Russian brilliance at Orel and Kharkov. The August of Montgomery and Eisenhower coming up through Sicily and Roosevelt and Churchill in Quebec for the first time. This was a time when days were checkerboards of wondering. The area rushed the completion of the bomb shelters. The Defense Unit, in full field equipment, went out to the pastures and played soldier. A gas defense team was formed, a first aid team, and the work of the war went on. There was preparedness in war as well as peace.

The Enlisted Men's Mess came under the supervision of a Colonel who failed utterly and left it a shambles of slow feeding and long, interminable lines. Pedro Garza was drawn from the Mess Hall and came to the area and took care of the boiler in the wash room and kept the latrines in tip-top order. Without a doubt he was the finest latrine orderly in the whole of the ETO. His pal, Antonio Barbosa, became the BOQ orderly and he did well, too. But Pedro's success was doomed. One night he sallied into Harleston, about seven miles down the road, and got himself tanked with beer and before the night was over a great GI truck had quietly but forcefully backed over Pedro's foot which left him in the hospital for months and with a permanent limp throughout the war.

There was a change, too, in the Orderly Room. Kenneth Peterson who had been the Squadron's Sergeant Major since the activation of the unit, so long a standard fixture around the Squadron, suddenly got what he had wanted for so long. To be a First Sergeant on his own. He went over to the 351st Squadron and there he became a first sergeant with all the trimmings. The men watched him go and were glad for him. He was a popular man, this Swede, and he maintained his friendships throughout his stay on the field.

With Peterson gone, a replacement was necessary and so Pancho came back from Group S-1 to work in the Orderly Room. Pancho, with his strut and swagger and good endeavor, with his incredible line of bull and his wonderful accent. It was "Corporal Ramirez, tree fitty bum squadron" on the phone from then on. To the intense delight of his pal, Lieutenant Bowers, who would sit tense on the edge of his chair, waiting for Pancho to get a chance to answer the phone.

David Hey came from the parachute department to take his place as a permanent Charge of Quarters while Henry Fox and Jim Fitch followed Harry McMillion's example and went out to live in the hut by the Tech Supply buildings. To be nearer their work, they said.

When the men got their passes they went into London, mostly, especially at first. Now and then a complete crew was allowed out and that helped a little to relieve them of the strain of the missions. London and Norwich. Those seemed to be the most popular.

You would get on the train at Diss about two in the afternoon and go down through Norfolk and Suffolk and on into Essex at what seemed a leisurely pace, down through the peaceful English countryside, passing occasionally through a slow, old-fashioned village or town, like Haughley or Colchester or Chelmsford, and then miles more of the always green countryside, broken only here and there by a narrow road. A steady procession of fields blood-red with the same poppies that grow on Flanders Fields. At Chelmsford we noticed the first barrage balloons. Suspended, silent, guarding. Chelmsford, too, had the first battery of guns that we noticed. A whole block of them, controlled and fired by a single person. They were silent, guarding, too.

As the train got nearer London we could see the first sights of the remnants of the blitz of 1940-41. Houses along the side of the tracks stood giving mute evidence of the war. Windows shattered, mere shells of a building left here and there. Now and then nothing but a chimney in the middle of a vacant empty lot.

Suddenly we crossed a bridge. Blocks and blocks of ruin, cleaned and neat in their tragedy, but still a reminder of those days when the Germans came over on fifteen-minute intervals from six in the evening until six in the morning for fifty-six days without a break.

We arrived in town in the late afternoon and hit for the Washington Club. Some of the men stayed at the Columbia or the Mostyn Club out near Marble Arch or scattered around at the hotels like the Piccadilly or the Cumberland but I always liked the Washington. The accommodations weren't too bad. A bed and a towel for thirty-two cents. The rooms were barracks-like, true, six and eight to a room but clean and somehow sleeping in a room full of strangers didn't bother you any more.

I went down through the park into Hyde Park and the corner and listened for a moment to the speakers who, war or no war, were still speaking. Then down Oxford street past Selfridges, the store built and owned by the American Selfridge. They caught it too and a smoky frown along the top story still bore evidence to the ravages of the fire that gutted the building the year before.

The area around St. Pauls drew me. Simply vacant lots, now, clean and waiting for rebuilding. The dock area, too. The Germans made a good job of that. Sometimes they hit something worth hitting. The rest of the time, just pure destruction. The Guild Hall was gone. The little church that stands in the center of the Strand—nothing but the walls that framed it. The Law Courts a mess of timber and stone, black and scarred.

I went down Regent's street, stopping for a drink at Verry's, and then walked down the gentle curve into Piccadilly. Walking along the curve of the Circus and down the dark alley of Coventry Street. Fending my way through the dark mass of anonymous men and women buying and selling. Past the newspaper vendor on the corner of Shaftesbury Avenue with his two-toned voice—"Papers—Papers"—a drop in tone.

At three o'clock in the black morning the rising-falling banshee wail of the alert woke me. I lay there and listened to it being sounded all over the city. It cried itself away and that mighty listening silence set in. After a while I could hear the soft, faraway echoes of bomb explosions, not many, just a couple. And after another little while, the steady, soft, reassuring note of the all-clear.

The next day I did as all Americans did. I wandered around the city. Went into the Odeon. Went to the Rainbow Club on Shaftesbury, that little island of America in the middle of Piccadilly. Then to a play starring Noel Coward. Then to the Lyons Corner House on Coventry Street where I ate something, had a beer, and became coy with the women of the streets.

There was not much liquor. Liquor was divided incidentally into two price



brackets. Scotch when available retailed for four or five shillings (80c to \$1.00) a shot and for four pounds ten shillings (\$18.00) a bottle. It's questionable and not always good. Beer, bitters, ale and stout are on the native side and down in the penny classification. Palatable after the first couple of pints went down.

Women were women. Around Piccadilly they clustered especially after the blackout hours. They strolled along the streets, loitered in the doorways or along the curbs. They knew what they wanted and they outlined it in bold, unmistakable terms. They had a knack of placing an arm on your sleeve as they talked, feeling out the number of stripes or bars there and making their price accordingly. These were the "Piccadilly Commandos" and they were commandos in every sense of the word.

That night the sirens came again. But there was nothing exciting and we went back to sleep. It was on the bus on the way to the station the next morning that I got my first good look at St. Pauls and the area blitzed around it. I saw people lining up to buy their allotment of vegetables from the push-carts along the street, kids playing in the vacant lots where two years before masses of people had lived. I watched the old men pedalling their bicycles along Fleet Street on their way to work, old men who could remember other times and other wars. I saw the clippies on the buses, and women serving, too, as wardens and policewomen, laborers and truck drivers. Kids, little kids, like the kind who pinch gum from the candy store back home, working all day long in an effort to do their part.

The people in the little towns and farms around us have been quiet and somewhat untouched by the things that have come to London and Coventry and Liverpool and the rest. The Germans haven't bothered to do much more than occasionally annoy the country people. A thatched roof is not much of a target. Unless there are a lot of them together. So these country people in Norfolk just puttered along. They gave their sons and their daughters. But in that giving there is a kind of terrible pride in giving up your own flesh and blood with the rest. There is no little town in England that does not have it cenotaph and there will be others. These people of the countryside only read the papers, read the newspaper lists of the missing and the wounded; they listen to the BBC, they receive the wires from the War Secretary, but they've not had to crouch underground and wait out the nights nor have they dug in the rubble for the family that stayed at home. So their attitude is higher and more invincible than the man of the London street. Britain is unconquerable and does not need help from Americans, some of them even say. For them we Americans came to fight our own battles, not so much to help. They do not have the peculiar gratitude of the city. Theirs is more the forced hospitality of the native to the alien. This is the attitude of the whole, not the individual. The Americans notice it this way. Between the people of the cities of Britain and the country there is a division. There will be no unity of thought until perhaps some awful future when all men suffer together in equal parts, which God forbid.

So when passes came up every other week the men went into Norwich to the pubs and the Theatre Royal or the Hippodrome or down the other way to London to see Tommy Trinder in "Best Bib and Tucker", or Sid Field in "Strike a New Note" and they came back whistling the songs from "The Lisbon Story" and the one from the Sid Field show "I'm Gonna Get Lit Up When the Lights Go up in London". Or they came from Norwich whistling "Roll Me Over", or something else they'd picked up from the Coach and Horses, or the Castle Bar or the dance at Sampson's and Hercules.

In the meantime the time had come for the Squadron Party. It had been decided on the base that each Friday night would be devoted to an individual organization's dance to be held in the Old Officers' Club. So in the middle of the long restriction it came time for the 350th's fling into British social life. Jimmie Whitmire took hold in the kitchen and prepared a sumptuous repast of cake and sandwiches and peanuts and salad, while Jim Carlton, who had become the

Squadron's special service representative, took charge of getting the hall decorated and ready. And arrangements were made to gather girls from Norwich, Brockdish, Bungay, and the adjacent countryside. From Lt. Paul's PX came three or four kegs of beer and the camp orchestra supplied the music.

So the girls came and preferred the groaning table of food to the dancing, and the men went for the beer in a big way.

Meantime, the Major, waiting for the word to fly, grew impatient and, his energies bottled up, had to find a medium of expression. So he found it in an overwhelming plan for reconstruction designed to make Site 4 the beauty spot of East Anglia. He started. Using his labor battalion, composed of men from each department, suitably armed with shovels and hoes and rakes he first blitzed the Enlisted Men's washrooms. There he, aided by some nimble brains from the Engineering department like Alex Sokolosky and Paul Gazda, erected a system of showers with such cunning skill and odds and ends of stolen pipe that the 350th became the first and only Squadron on the base to have their own shower room. Then racing against time and Major Veal of the 349th with whom he had his own private little bet that he could make his area the most attractive, the Major started a reconstruction program beginning from the east and coming west, inexorably. Landscaping became the order of the day. Grass was cut and weeds uprooted; dirt mounds became level and construction junk that the English workmen had gone gaily off and left in the area disappeared. The Major's eye fell on the walks. They needed something added, he thought! And the something was bricks!

Now, bricks in wartime England were like everything else. Scarce. Very hard to get. Though it would seem that the country produced little else but brick. The Major's little band of privateers went out into the night to the site of a new building on the other end of the field and stole great masses of bricks from the labor construction gang. And as the bricks in their jagged design began to appear lining the walks there also appeared in his car along the area side the British Clerk of the Works and his henchman. They patrolled the area making mental and literal notes and then disappeared. The MP's came by a little later on.

The terms of the contractor were certainly definite and to the point. They were about as conclusive as they could be. He wanted his bricks back! Every last one of them. He claimed, somewhat petulantly, that he had a half-finished building and that he simply could not finish without the ornamental bricks that the 350th had so outrageously stolen. The Major's reaction, the first reaction, was a hearty thought. "To hell with him!" But when the contractor calmly stated that he was on his way to tell the Colonel about it, the Major took a new view of the whole thing. He was impressed. Everyone placed so much emphasis on the business of keeping the relations between the Americans and the British on the highest possible plane. In private circles he admitted that he'd probably lose the bricks. But—here he put down his foot—if so, the contractor would have to come and dig them up himself! Small satisfaction. He maintained his silence. Defeated? Hell, no! But everyone had reckoned without the Squadron's master of deception, Lieutenant Paul. The PX Paul.

Somehow the news of the latest catastrophe reached Paul. He grabbed his bicycle and came on down to the area to appraise the situation. One look and a listen and a diabolical gleam came into his eye. That night he saw the contractor. I wouldn't say he bribed the contractor. Rather, he struck up a working agreement. Through a system of exchange involving bricks, cigarettes, and other sundries, Paul emerged triumphant. So triumphant, in fact, that the contractor brought ANOTHER load of bricks the next morning and sent his regrets that he could not spare the labor to have them set in place along the walks. The 350th smirked and went on laying their own brick.

One night the crews were working on the planes all around the perimeter

and a terrific lightning storm broke over Eastern England. The skies lit up with blinding flashes. A crew made up of John Riffle, Coleman Sartoris, Al Kapper, and others were working that night inside one of the ships. In face of the storm they went right on working. Suddenly there was a riveting shock. The crew scrambled white-faced from the inside of the plane. They went back to their work, treating the ship gingerly and with care the rest of the night.

The time of August passed. The whole of the coast from the Wash down to the very tip of England was a restricted and banned area. The big mission of the 17th came and the crews were gone. The men read in the papers about it and they heard through the grapevine that the crews had landed in Africa and were waiting for the weather to clear. And for repairs to be made. But news was scarce. All the boys knew was that something big had happened. They sweated out the return.

# X

It was Sunday the 22nd before any news of definite nature came in. Major Eagen of the 418th had come back. He brought in his wake a whole flock of rumors. Bad heavy rumors and, like all Army rumors, they had a ring of truth to them. The thing was we had lost four crews. The Major was safe, but there were four crews gone. The men from the line ate their Sunday dinner in silence, staring preoccupied at their plates. No one knew for sure who had been lost. Just that it was four crews. Then, on the 24th, Tuesday, just a week since they had left on the mission, the Major came back. Tired, worn-looking, with an unusual stubble of beard on his chin and the story of the flight to Regensburg on his lips.

Active preparation for the mission had begun on the night of the 16th. Though they were ordinary in their general routine, there was behind them a drive that led casual observers to see something a little bigger, a little more impressive. The armament personnel along with Ordnance worked late into the night loading the bulk of the planes on the field. At an early hour the crews were awakened and driven to the briefing room. The fact that the crews were issued special rations, told to take extra blankets, money and equipment was the actual tip off that the planes were not expected back that same day. But opinion at that time on the destination of the ships was split. Some said it was a raid on Berlin, continuing on to Russia. Others thought it was on to Africa.

The planes warmed up at five-fifteen that morning and by five-forty-five they had taxied on to the perimeter, methodically lining up before the runway strip. First, Major Cleven who was to lead the mission, with Lieutenant Scott as his co-pilot and then the ships of Lieutenant Hummel, Lieutenant Claytor, and Captain DeMarco and finally Lieutenant Braley. The planes got off the ground in routine fashion, circled the field once and then headed out to the coast and their rendezvous with the planes of the other groups. The Squadron was flying the low, lead element, a rough spot to sit out, particularly where flak was concerned. It was not long before they were to receive their full share.

They crossed the Channel, flying upwards towards Germany across Belgium, hitting for the lower Rhine valley before straightening their course. Just east and south of Frankfort the first blows of the defenders began to rain down on them. There had been a smattering of flak from time to time since they had crossed the coastline. But, at a given point near Frankfort, all hell seemed to break loose. The Germans had apparently gotten wind of their coming, for there was a royal reception committee in attendance from the time of the first blow until well after they had passed beyond the target. The first members of the defensive team sat outside the firing range of the Forts for a few minutes, as though they were speculating the form of attack, and then they came in. Down they dropped and veering away they retraced their steps, coming from all angles, blasting, ripping,



tearing with their deadly and continuous fire. The Forts flew on, tightening the formation as closely as they dared, giving as little quarter to the enemy as possible under the fury of the attackers. The air was a cloud of steel, murderous and steady. .20 mm cannon blazed from the wings of the Focke-Wulf's. It seemed the enemy in his effort to stop this thrust against the heart of the country literally threw up everything possible. FW's, Junkers, Heinkels, anything he had that could fly anything able to get off the ground, were sent upstairs to break the thrust.

But the Forts had their own advantage in their deadly ring of fire. Even though the enemy displayed that brilliant daring bravado that was so marked every time in an attack on this scale they could not dare, did not dare, to stand long against the withering offensive fire of the big ships. Their plan was to come in quickly and then disperse after each parry. In little clusters of three and four they came barreling down, whipping around, rising up as close as possible under the spitting belly of a Fort. In from three o'clock, down from twelve o'clock, up from six, and straight, until it seemed they would drive right into the very noses of the oncoming Forts they kept up the ceaseless, murderous, repetitious attack. The gunners sat, crouched or stood by their windows and in their turrets, faces dripping with perspiration, streaked with powder marks and grease, conserving their fire as much as they could, putting their shots in place with close sighting, trying to make each burst tell.

It looked bad from the very beginning. Never before had the enemy thrown up such a competent, deadly defensive action. Nor on the other hand had the Americans attempted to penetrate so deeply into Germany with such a great horde of ships. And the Germans, with the wounds of Hamburg and Berlin on the home front, with the Russians cutting into their flanks on the eastern front, with scandal and deterioration setting in in Denmark, with the south of their **European Fortress** crumbling away, were bitterly determined that this anniversary raid would be a crushing, determined, marked failure. The Americans sat grimly in the German sky and were positive and relentless in their determination that they would succeed. The attack went on.

The Germans must have known the path of their flight. For the fighters came up and engaged the Forts in attack and then, when their fuel and their ammunition began to give out, they went away apparently to refuel and resupply themselves. In the meantime their places were taken by other fighters, refuelled and refreshed, a sort of shuttle service, designed to keep the Americans under constant attack, harried and nervous for the next movement of attack, whether it was above, below, or in from the sides.

From the first moments over Frankfort until some two hours later, when they came over the target, the attack went on. The Germans were using ace pilots, too. Pilots who knew no fear. They would get out in front of the oncoming Forts and the pilot of the big ship would see him as though he were suspended in air a great distance away and then, in a twinkling of an eye, the German would be directly in front of the ship, right there where it seemed you could reach out and touch him, his wings blazing in a screaming, spitting hate, coming so close that it seemed he was going to crash, before he would swish upwards or sideways and skim past. It was then that the Fort's gunners would throw out their knifelike thrusts of fire that would rip into the fighter. He'd either turn and cut away or go plunging down, twisting in an agony of flame and smoke. Or he'd pause, as though startled momentarily, hung against the sky, before he almost silently disintegrated in a blinding, smokeball flash.

The Forts were not invincible. Bullets found their marks all along the armada. Over there a ship would suddenly rise a moment and then go curving in a great arc, splaying outward from the formation, a thin evil stream of smoke and flame coming from an engine. Suddenly the whole wing would be a mass of flame and

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the ship would go twisting and hurtling down towards the earth. The men in the other ships could see the bodies of men shooting out into space and, after a minute, the sudden convulsive puff and blossom of the chute. Sometimes they'd go down that way, slipping out of sight swinging. And sometimes the chute would open and be white in the sunlight before a speck of dark would be there, a speck that ate swiftly and turned the chute into a brief, minute touch of flame. The man who had been there for the second would be a gyrating, awkward, disappearing dot. But the men who looked out on these things and fought saw them only a moment before they went on with their fight. They saw these things for only a moment. Things like the sudden, quick explosion of a ship somewhere in the unit; a black quick smudge of flame and fire and then the pieces that would come hurtling past their windows or their turrets. The quick rush of a body that would pass them. They saw these things only for a moment.

They had their own fight. Each man in his own plane. Though they were a crew and each dependent on the man next to him and all of them on the man in the pilot's seat, there was still a little bit of personal war there, too. Bullets of every size and description whistled by, creasing their way past the gunners imbedding themselves in every part of the plane structure. Now and then a cannon shell crashed through the thin fuselage and buried itself deep in the plane's interior before it would explode, spattering the ship with deadly fragments. One came into the Major's ship as he sat there grimly hanging on to the wheel. It exploded and caught James Parks, a gunner, in the legs, tearing through his calves. Still another came in and buried itself near the Major's feet and went off, catching Lieutenant Norman in the arm. Bullets were everywhere. Another crashed close to Lieutenant Menzies' position where he stooped, firing without pause. Suddenly Jerry Ferroggiaro noticed the door to the radio room hanging loosely and went forward to investigate. He found the Radio Operator, Norman M. Smith, lying there beside his radio, mortally wounded. Smitty had been shot through the legs. A portion of his oxygen mask had blown away. He died there, above Germany, from loss of blood and oxygen. The Major came in and he and Jerry tried to do what they could for Smitty, but it was too late.

Constant flak rose up from the ground and hung aimlessly against the skies around them. Great jagged holes ripped into the wings and structure. But they went on, somehow, went on battling, snarling, tearing their way almost manually to the target, guns blazing and hot from the nose and from the tails, from the turrets and windows. Now and then a member of the Squadron had to yield. Damage and injuries were too heavy. Lieutenant Claytor's ship dropped slowly from the formation and went down, circling, watched by two or three German fighters. Just before the target, Lieutenant Braley's ship struck difficulties and, in the heat of the battle, he disappeared, too.

Among the tragic losses of the day was Staff Sergeant Richard (Dick) Bowler. Blond, good-natured Dick Bowler had been a gunner during the training in the States, but following an arm injury, had been retired to the ground personnel. His heart was in the sky, however, and, finally, he prevailed upon the powers that be to give him another chance in the air. He got what he wanted and happily flew over Germany. The first trip was a satisfying treat to him. On his second mission he was killed. It was a stunning blow to his wide circle of friends, both in the air and ground echelon. Dick was mourned deeply.

Finally they got over the target, Regensburg, hard won, down below there. They flew over and, from the bellies of each ship, tumbled in a great line the strings of bombs on the roofs of the factories that turned out aircraft engines and parts. Parts that might have repaired some of the damage that came to the Luftwaffe this day. As they turned south over the Bavarian mountains a tall, tell-tale plume of smoke rose spiraling into the skies to score their success.

There were still the rudiments of a good fight for a half-hour after they left the target. At one furious rushing onslaught a direct hit caught Lieutenant Hummel's ship and it was seen to explode, literally throwing bits in every direction. The Forts flew on out of Germany, into Switzerland. At this time, discounting its four losses, the Squadron seemed to be holding its own. The Major could see Lieutenant Hollenbeck's ship with the number 4 engine feathered but coming along and this way they made their way across the Alps. Just beyond the Alps, however, Hollenbeck disappeared and was not seen again. The rest of the ships in the formation sailed out, unmolested now, over the Mediterranean, crossing down the length of Italy over into Tunisia where they finally came to a landing field made ready for them at Telergma, at the base of the bare Constantine Mountains. Dirty and hot, they came to their landing, the planes throwing up a gigantic dust plume behind them as they taxied to their areas.

It was twelve hours since they had left England. They took Parks and Norman off to the hospital and they wrapped Smitty tenderly and took him away. The crews settled down for the night, sleeping in the shadows of their battered, ragged planes. Of the twenty-five officers and thirty-six enlisted men who had started out that morning together, there were nine officers and twelve enlisted men left!

The wires began to burn around the world telling the story of Regensburg. Of the nine original crews that had gone through the initial training period in the States and came to war together, six had gone and there were only three of the 'col.' crews left. Lieutenant DeMarco, Lieutenant Scott and Lieutenant Helstrom, who had been left behind in England on this mission. All the rest of the crews, the ones led by Hollenbeck, Braley, Hummel, Claytor, and the earlier losses of Carey and Duncan, had gone. While the score sheet was dwindling, the ground crews sat in England in a hay-stack field, wondering what had happened.

The planes came back from Africa in a straggling parade. Several were damaged so badly that they could not make the trip; so their crews came back with the ATC. The Major had different ideas. He remained while they patched up Lieutenant DeMarco's ship. In he piled with the crew and they came back—with a load of bombs. Scott's crew came back via the sightseeing route over the ocean, while the Major chose the hard way. He loaded up his battered ship with fuel and bombs and set out on the tail end of a formation coming up over occupied France. As he went by Bordeaux he dumped out his bombs to tear great jagged holes in the factories of the town. Then he came on back to England.

The Major sat back in the interrogation room and told his story. He looked tired and there was that unfamiliar stubble on his face. The grime of Africa streaked his face and clothing and when he mentioned the lost crews, little shadows flicked in his eyes. But he looked at Jerry, the gunner, who never got enough shots, and he asked quietly:

"How was it, Jerry?"

And Jerry would grin, but there was a serious new note in his voice.

"Rough" was all he'd say about this one. There was a spark of admiration in his voice when you talked to him after the Major had gone. After the strain had eased off a little and the whole had begun to sink into memories, he'd talk about the waves of fighters and the peppering barrage of flak, the deaths and the losses.

He'd say, very slowly, not to you or anyone in particular:

"It's the Old Man," he'd say shortly. "I'd fly to hell with him."

And you knew, somehow, he would, too.

There were aftermaths of Regensburg. The Major was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his work on that flight.

On the 9th of February, 1944, six months later, on General Orders, Number 35, Headquarters of the Eighth Air Force, a citation to the entire division was issued and subsequently became a part of War Department orders, giving to each of us the



the Presidential Unit Citation, that little gold rimmed "picture frame" of blue which we wore with all pride on our right breast, in memory of Regensburg.

# XI

Life went on, for all the Regensburgs. A mission to Stuttgart on the 6th of September was pretty much routine, though the target was obscured. They dumped their bombs on the airfield at Evereaux and trotted back over the channel to home. After the noses were counted two more crews were listed as missing. Lieutenant Grenier and Lieutenant Vetter. A half hour later the word came through that Vetter had landed in the south of England, undamaged. His story was the story of the day. He had been knocked out of the formation over Stuttgart, unable to maintain his altitude. Realizing his chances of remaining at fighter level were extremely ill-advised, he decided to go on deck and dropped the big ship to about a hundred feet or so off the ground. And began a mad, careening dash 250-miles an hour at tree-top level across the face of France. They zoomed past villages and towns, across farm lands and rivers, following the rail lines and the roads. They'd long since lost the formation and they skittered along on their own. The gunners contented themselves taking explosive bursts at anything and everybody they saw and, now and then, they'd come racing upon a startled German anti-aircraft battery and bust them wide open before the bewildered Germans could retaliate. The plane was too low for fighter attack and not high enough for the AA gunners to get a line on them before they were away and down the road.

From the 9th of September until the 13th the weather settled down over the field and closed off all the operations definitely. First it rained, turning the field into a sleazy, slippery morass. When this had been exhausted, up from the ground, from the static pools and the light-textured earth came the filmy veils of fog to hang listlessly and gradually multiply until their wisps were a great hugging blanket over the whole face of Eastern England. It was as if the heavens had decided to take sides with the enemy for a change to give them a temporary respite. But respite for one was respite for the other.

The Major chafed at the inactivity and kept his eye on the carpenter, Ken Retz. Poor Retz slaved from morning until night on the shelves and tables and other improvements. As the Major said, the office staff never appreciated his office rearrangements until they were done and then they had to admit they were pretty good. The Major appreciated the work that Retz did. Retz could make wonderful unbelievable things with no material at all and he kept on doing it day in and day out. "He's a wizard," the Major said. And he was.

That was one thing about the Major. He appreciated everything that people did for him, big or small, important or unimportant. One day he sat back in his map-walled office, tilting his chair back, pushing his cap on the back of his head.

"You know," he said, staring out of the window up the road into the area. "I wish there was some way I could tell the guys what a good, all-around job they're doing." He paused and picked at his thumb nail and thought. "Take the line, for example. McMillion's a good line chief, and Strain, Leypoldt, Riffle, Kotwica, Lynch, McDonough, Tisdale—all of them—the little guys, too, like Norred and Musczynski and Frum—they're doing a heck of a bang-up job, taking care of those ships, patching them up, bringing them to life again time after time. Keeping them up there. It's not an easy job. And just how good those men are—", the Major picked up a pencil, tapping it lightly on the edge of the desk—"how good they are is just how good we are. We owe a lot to guys like Mill and Martin. Vickers and Cannon, Gabor and Tiquet. All of them. There's so many of them, and not a slacker in the bunch. They're all in there pitching to make and keep the line what it is. A tip-top unit. I'd stack that line of mine against any other in the business."

The Major fell silent. Bill Jackson came in, nodded hello, spoke briefly to Kirm

and then went on out again. The Major followed him with his eyes.

"Take Jackson's department." He made a vague little motion with the pencil. "There's another top department—communications. That's an odd set-up—sort of self-sufficient by itself. But it takes working together. Jackson's good and kids like Dolezal and Dietzel, DeLeeuw and Geisinger, and the rest of them, Budine, O'Brien, Scott, Lyons, Donahue, Ketchum. All of them working like one man. Yes, and those kids in the telephone shack. Kids like Walton, Keehn, Oldroyd, Blaeuer and the rest of the linemen, too."

Jim Fitch interrupted the Major, slouching into the room, puffing on his pipe, laconically growling, "Hi Major."

"How's everything, Fitch?"

"Army's okeh." Fitch took the pipe from his mouth, grinned sheepishly and nodded over to Kim.

Then he went on out.

"Old Fitch is a good boy." The Major chuckled. "Tech Supply's okeh too. Fitch, Fox, Nyfeler, Mabry, Ackerman do okeh out there. That applies to the clerks out at the Engineering office, too. Guys like Cooperman, Lake, Cole, and the others. They do their part as much as the rest of us."

The Major sat back and yawned. He tossed the pencil into his outgoing box on the desk and stared out of the window. The Armament truck tore by on the road outside, careening dangerously on the curve, drooping with the bulging weight of the Armament crowd.

"They'll kill someone one of these days," someone in the room solemnly prophesied. The Major grinned.

"Nah, they're all right." He grew thoughtful. "I guess they catch more hell than anybody—they and the Ordnance men—" His eyes glinted. "Just the other day, for example. I had to get a ship loaded in just twelve minutes. And that's no joke. But they did it." He paused and then went on. "I got in touch with Hays and out he came with Ballasch, Bonucchi, Leo, Sobek, Douglass, Verser, Van Beek and all the rest. The thing I like about the Armorers is guys like Smith, Strohkirsch, Uhrling and Gouin. You can count on men like that. You've got to have them in this business. And you're lucky if you get them. I'm lucky." The Major looked at his hand on his knee. "Same thing goes for Ordnance. They go side by side. They got to be equally good and equally dependable. Ordnance and Armament. Picardi, Chrzanowski, Karaglou, Krzywicki, Kushner, Dorman, Ernst—all of them good." The ordnance truck came roaring down from the area past the Orderly Room chasing Armament out to the line, kicking up little spurts of dust as it went. "There they go now!" He grinned as they flew by. "Another night's work."

Joe Davin came in from his session at the Beer Hall, his cup clanking on his belt.

"Hi Joe, how's tricks?" The Major grinned at him. Davin started, grew red and confused.

"Okeh, Major," he said. Abstractly he turned to the new Charge of Quarters.

"Wake me at 6", he said simply. Skaggs made a notation on the pad.

"Crews alerted?" Joe asked, growing red again.

"Yeah. We'll be out after them tomorrow," the Major said.

"Another night up early," Joe grunted.

"Don't like missions, huh, Joe?" The Major leaned forward slightly.

"Well, sir, it's just that they're always getting up in the middle of the night. It's get up at 2 and take 'em to breakfast, take 'em to the briefing room, take 'em to the plane. Then I get a chance to sleep. Until they come back." Joe spoke hurriedly and then subsided quickly, like a balloon from which the air has escaped. He dropped his eyes to the floor and blushed and went out.

The Major laughed. "They're all like that. Gripe a lot now and then. It's a

healthy sign. Show's they really don't mind it. Davin, Matz, Alley, Diers, Jack Smith, Creighton, Hoffman. All the boys in Transportation. We depend on them. They're there when you want them. You can't ask much more than that."

"Yes, sir." The Major leaned over the desk and scratched at the surface with his nail. "I'd like to tell them all they're okeh boys." He picked up a roster from the desk and ran his eye down the list.

"Kirn, Pancho, and that mail man who never brings any mail, Polver. The supply gang, Whitmire, Rinaldi and Bench. They're as much a part of all this as anyone. That goes for Dombroski, Hale, Vassar, Spence, and Linderoth in Operations, too. Nelson, Horak, Deleonardo in S-2. Garic and Chandler up at S-1. Legg, Reed, Bradley, Bryant, Gootnick, McCollister. Vespole and all the rest." The Major continued to read off the names. Monroe, Henry Young, Griffith, Sortevik, Menefee, Jimmie Whitmire. Captain Varian broke the silence. Yes, he was a Captain now.

"Have you ever seen the cooks when the red alert comes on at night?" He laughed. "They all put on their helmets and file out to the nearest shelter everytime without fail. They're good soldiers."

The Major chuckled. He was still looking down the lists of names. Hey, Miller, Wiley, Bowa, Hawkins, Lester, Reynolds, Secord, Eltzroth, Young. He shoved the chair back and lifted his feet to the desk, crossed them, tilting the chair back, pulling his cap down over his eyes.

"It's a great thing, the Squadron," he said softly. "I wouldn't give a million dollars for it. And I wouldn't give a million for the chance to repeat it all over again." He fell silent.

"You know what?" he said shortly. "There's really only one way to run a thing like this and be a real success at it. That's by the book. If I had it to do all all over again, that's how I'd do it. By the book. I'd be hard."

"You couldn't do it. You'd make a flop of it," Captain Varian said.

"No." The Major grunted as he sat up, untangling his feet. "I'd be a hard man. You can control people only by two reasons," he said seriously. "Either you command their respect as an individual or you command them because they know you have the authority and the knowledge. The best way is to have a combination of both. I'd do it by the book all the way. I'd be as hard as nails." He paused. "None of this friendship stuff."

"Hi ya, Major," one of the men shouted through the open window as he went down the walk outside.

"Hi", yelled the Major, and then looked at the people in the room. Everyone was very quiet.

Sergeant Burns came in and stood silently, waiting at the railing. Driving the Major was a full time job. Burns waited.

"Yes sir, I'd be a hard man." The Major stood up and stretched himself. "Well, little Chum," he looked at Varian. "Come on, let's get the gang and drive down to the show in Bungay."

He stalked out of the room, trailed by Captain Varian and Burns. The room was quiet and empty after he had gone.

## XII

On the fifteenth of September the ships went after the large Renault automobile plant in Paris. They went off, pointing down east towards France this time. Crossing the channel they cut in, following across the fallow French farm lands until they sighted the mottled outskirts of the city.

As the planes entered the Paris area they caught the full dose of flak again. The crews watched carefully and the Forts picked their way through the curtain. Over Paris itself it was almost impenetrable and more than once the leaders



thought the Groups would be forced to turn. There were a number of enemy fighters around to contend with, as well. But mainly it was a flak show this time. The fighters were content to bounce along on the outer fringes, to take little annoying but ineffectual jabs now and then.

But they got in and dropped their bombs, even though the effort cost them several planes, among them the ship piloted by Lieutenant Vetter. The same Vetter who had been reported missing only a week or so previously and who had returned hedge-hopping out of the French area.

The next day they went after Bordeaux, to repeat the Major's slap which he had delivered en route home from Africa. He led the formation this time as well. The route was down along the French coast, across the Bay of Biscay to the mainland; then inland and the port. After unloading the bombs they were to fly out to sea and come back to England flying out over the Atlantic beyond the reaches of the Nazi protecting planes. But plans are sometimes changed.

As they started down across the Bay of Biscay the weather changed. They were forced to abandon their original plan for Bordeaux. In its place they substituted La Pallice, the submarine base, still smarting from the attack they had delivered in July. So they turned their noses towards the coast and swept in from the sea towards their objective.

The Major turned the operation over to Lieutenant Phillippe, the bombardier. Across the target they swept, met by a curtain of flak and the angry resistance of the surprised and unprepared Luftwaffe. It was up to Phillippe to produce results on a bomb run of less than fifteen minutes. After the run was completed the Major called down to Phillippe on the interphone.

"How was it?"

"Okeh—of course," was Phillippe's reply on his work which was to place him and his fellows in line for decoration for distinguished service.

Later photographs of the bombing of La Pallice were to be superb examples of precision bombing, some of the finest work done in the ETO. It was "okeh—of course", as Phillippe had said.

The formation then headed back for the home port. Long before they hit the island the weather thickened and they were engulfed in a black thick blanket of cloud and night. Added to the unfamiliarity of night operations the overcast and the small fitful drizzle of rain began to harass them. After they left the French coast, cruising along, the crews relaxed their vigilance and sat around eating chocolate bars. Suddenly someone spied several enemy fighters bearing down on them from their right flank. These gained in number until about fifteen of them filled the sky and began nipping at their heels with nervous little jabs and thrusts. But with night coming on their attack was fruitless and they abandoned the attack as it neared the English coast.

The clouds thickened rapidly and the formation lost their bearings, ending up in a wheeling blind mass of Forts. Major Cleven instructed all hands to keep an especial look-out for wandering ships in the murk and, holding down the bit firmly, he pulled his own ship up through the clouds to a clearing in the sky, emerging from the formation at the top of the climb, alone, with one other ship following him. Sensing the futility of lingering around the south of England trying to find the lost sheep, the Major headed for home and set his ship down in the pitch black night about ten o'clock. It was the first night operation in their experience—though unplanned—and a not-too-successful one at that. The fact that no losses had been sustained was due to good luck.

On the 24th they flew off to bomb a ring of airfield installations near Vacennes, France, and got back safely. It was a routine mission, though the Major made it outstanding by aborting, a thing he deplored in others. He had little choice in the matter.

About three or four hours along their way, only some twenty minutes before they were scheduled to hit the target, the Major was talking over the interphone with his navigator, Lieutenant Downs. He noticed Downs talking in a strange and unorthodox sort of way. The Major promptly decided to investigate. It was unusual for Downs to act silly and babble a lot of nonsense, particularly at such a time. The Major frowned again and got a little irritable. Then he began to think. And as he pondered a loud explosion rocked the ship. The oxygen system had blown out. That explained everything. Downs was not acting silly on his own. It was the oxygen. There was nothing left to do but drop the ship down to a lower level and make for home.

Chagrined, the Major did just that. He maintained a discreet silence and watched the results of the raid come in. The results compensated a little for his own failure.

The next day one of those things happened, one of those monstrous mistakes that doesn't quite spell disaster. But could so very easily.

It was decided to hold a practice mission using virtually every plane in the 3rd Air Division. This meant some ten or twelve groups and a total of almost three hundred Flying Forts. The course was to fly out over Eastern England and out over some portions of the North Sea. The crews, as they always were in practice missions, cut down to skeleton. A radio man, an engineer, with maybe one or two others. Some of the ships, for example, took off that afternoon with only five men on board. And little or no ammunition.

Success was marked throughout the maneuver and the wing heads congratulated themselves all over the place on how good they were. Charting the course the Division navigator led them almost two hundred miles off course so that they practically crossed the narrow portion of the North Sea to a point within twenty-five miles of the Nazi-held Dutch coast. This foolhardiness paid off. Enemy fighters caught wind of the great formation approaching their coast and they came up prepared for a desperate battle to stop what looked like another wholesale onslaught against the Reich. They were luckily caught short and contented themselves with a series of hit and run pokes at the Forts, which, stripped of their defenses, began to mill around in a frantic effort to turn and run for the safety of the English coast. The enemy fighters were few and they waited for the Forts to start the trouble. But the Forts had trouble enough. Had the Luftwaffe known the simple fact that the formations were simply skeletons in crew, stripped of defenses, it is safe to assume that the Germans would have reaped a tremendous harvest that afternoon. For there before them in unknown helpless confusion, unarmed, was the main bombing strength of Eastern England. Three hundred Forts in those days was a tremendous war prize.

It amounted to no more than that. It was a black mark, a foolish, risky action that might well have resulted in total disaster. Again luck held for the Group.

Mistakes or no mistakes, the war went on. On the 27th the ships went out again to deliver a crippling blow at that section of Germany so vital to the shipping, the World War I and II port of Emden, a home of the German navy and center of heavy concentrations of naval and commercial shipping.

As the various groups converged to complete their battle pattern they were joined by large numbers of P-47 pursuit ships, who ranged themselves above and alongside the formations in a protective cluster. It was a good coverage and was, without a doubt, one of the first protective umbrellas yet provided for the safety of the big ships as they blasted the holes in the roof of the Fortress Europe.

The invading planes cut across the stubby nob of northwestern Germany, heading directly towards the notched shoreline and the city of Emden. The overcast continued to lie like a thick unbroken mantle through which visibility was impossible.

But the force this day had an answer to combat the dense impenetrability of the clouds. That was the "pathfinder" system.

Working on the radar principle, the lead ship or pathfinder carried a device which, by electrical impulses sent out at short intervals, contacted the target. The target picture would then be slotted in general outline on the plate of the mechanism. When the target had thus been contacted and the impression made, the image of the target area was visible to the "mickey operator" and, working with the bombsight, the bombs were then dropped. The method was devised for use in overcast conditions and, as such, apparently had its advantages, even this early in the game. But in these early trials it could not be absolutely accurate and with the heavy overcast being what it was this day, it was impossible to tell just how accurate the results were. Certainly some area near to the target area received a terrific blasting.

It wasn't a milk run, this raid, for all the fighter protection that had been given them. The Germans were desperately defending Emden. They threw up a great curtain of flak until it seemed the whole area was one great splotched pattern of the ugly, snood-like bursts. But these attempts failed to stop the formation and they came on home without loss.

On the night of the 4th of October preparations for another deep penetration raid was started. They installed the Tokio tanks. Late that night the crews were gathered up and trundled off to breakfast and the briefing.

The target turned out to be Frankfort, the industrial center on the river Main, on the edge of the Black Forest, the home of a tremendous German war effort. Here was located the VDM propellor works and the famed I. G. Farbin chemical plant, along with the Opal, Bosche, and Adler plants, all specialists in war equipment. Everyone of them a juicy, waiting target. These, along with the tremendous marshalling yards that surrounded the city, made Frankfort and the suburban town of Hanau a vital spot, so vital that it was virtually impossible to drop a bomb in this area and not hit some defensive effort. The Groups flew out over the Channel, entering Germany through the front door, their tanks full of gas, their bellies full of bombs. The gunners watched the skies and over and around the formation flew the blue and yellow P-47's, watchful, on guard.

As the formations came over the continent there was little defensive activity. Now and then there was a short, ineffective burst of flak from the ground, but on the whole there was a noticeable lack of enthusiasm on the part of the enemy. But this lack was not without plan. For the fighters had been drawn out from the area to the north by a large group of Liberators who had set out for the North Sea to draw swarms of fighters in that direction. The Liberators feinted and made idle passes at the shoreline. The fighters swarmed along the coastline determined to stop them if they dared cross. Meanwhile, southwards, the Forts were crossing in great strength. The Germans had bitten for the wrong bait. They fought with the Libs, struggling furiously while the Forts droned on towards Frankfort.

Over the target they let their bombs go, attentively watching the flak which had grown in intensity and accuracy. The Major criss-crossed the target three times before they finally dropped the load and then they flew on south over Augsburg, over into France before turning for home.

Suddenly the Major ran into difficulty. First one engine went out and he feathered the prop and then the other burned out. The ship began to lose speed under its heavy load and, rather than fall behind the formation and expose himself to preying attackers, the Major called on the crew to toss overboard all the spare weight that could be removed. That meant tossing the ammunition out and all the movable fixtures and, if necessary, even the guns themselves. One of the gunners was a little reluctant to accept the idea but the Major blasted at him over the interphone. He moved with alacrity from then on. Boxes of ammunition began to plummet from the ship. Down onto the heads of those below went the 125-pound



boxes, twisting and plunging from 20,000 feet. The ship lightened perceptibly and gained its speed. The Major was safe and sound this trip.

The formation skirted the Paris area and headed for the coast. Using the direction finder the Major called the wing leader and found that the wing navigator couldn't get a fix on their position. The Major promptly supplied the fix himself through Lieutenant Gospodar, his navigator. Eventually they broke the coast and looked down at Le Havre and crossed to go into England.

At the time they arrived at the coast Captain Helstrom was seen flying beside the formation. Then, when the formation started out over the Channel and broke up, they noticed that Helstrom had simply disappeared!

No one saw him go. Most were ready to swear that they had seen him make it on over to England and the general belief, after they got down on the ground, was that he had run out of gas—all the planes were extremely low on fuel when they arrived back—he had run out of gas and had probably landed in the south of England for refueling. But the hours dragged on through the night and next day. The hours became days. Still no word from him. Finally on the second day it was generally conceded that Helstrom and his crew were down on the other side. Whether he had become confused with some other ship and had never really made it as far as the channel or whether he had become confused himself over the channel and, in some manner, had turned and headed back into France instead of following through into England, no one knew. It was a mystery and remained so.

Captain Helstrom was gone. That left the 350th with two of the original crews left! Four months to the day after arriving in England. We had lost nine crews, a one hundred percent loss so far as strength was concerned; a seventy-five percent loss so far as our original flying personnel was counted. The man with the highest number of missions to his credit still had some five missions to make before his operational tour of duty was completed. It was a hard, nervous game and the tired men were those few who still had the five to make. Their eyes and their hearts were set on finishing up now, going home. Their minds were full of friends who were down across the Channel, missing, already prisoners of war. They crossed their fingers and waited. Christmas edged a little closer every day.

In the meantime, the ground crews toiled and managed to keep them flying. The weather turned cold, and by the beginning of October there were nights and mornings that were brutally cold. With the coming of autumn came also the Germans in the night hours. They began to make little examining tours over the eastern countryside, armed with flares and bombs, apparently trying to get the general lay of the land, to spot the fields and the targets for their work a little later on in the winter.

Red alerts—enemy present—became the usual thing on nights good for flying, and shortly after nine o'clock in the evening the long thin fingers of searchlights would begin to sweep across the skies near the coast. There was a big searchlight just behind the field which was a marker beacon for the RAF as well as a control for night-fighters. It pointed straight up into the heavens, blinking on and off with a code of some sort. It never moved, just pointed straight up. They said the fighters assigned to defend the coast were never allowed to leave a prescribed area around the light, so that there were never any loopholes in the defensive system. The old blinker would come on as the alerts were sounded and remained on until the all clear was done.

There were three alerts. "Green" all clear; purple "unidentified aircraft in the vicinity," and Red "enemy present." On the receipt of the red alert, by telephone and announced over the field's loud speaker system, all lights and movement were put out and stopped and the field remained still and watchful.

On the night of the 27th of September the usual "red alert" came over the

Tannoy System. There was the sound of a plane off in the distance but no matter how hard the men on the ground tried to spot the ship it couldn't be done. The night was very cold, inky black, and the lights swept futilely around the skies trying to pick out what seemed to be a single plane. Suddenly they nailed him flush against the sky. But the pilot was too crafty. Realizing his utter helplessness in such a position he threw the plane into a steep dive directly over the field. Down he came, then with a grinding harsh roar he pulled out of the dive and sped out across the night. The men on the ground, standing in the shelter of the barracks and out along the roadways of the field, breathed a little more easily.

Whenever they came over East Anglia they'd generally be down in London as well. I don't know yet which was worse, bombing or that infernal patrolling around! Whether to have them go ahead and drop their damned bombs or just that aimless cruising around in the night! Out in the country it was a peculiar detached sort of fighting. Now and then, of course, they would drop one or two with a far-away muffled roar and there'd come that funny, sinky feeling in the pit of your stomach.

In London they dropped them now and then. But when the British anti-aircraft defenses opened up, splashing the skies with flak bursts over the city little sharp deadly pellets of steel shells would rain down over the streets. The pedestrian was in far greater danger of getting one of those on his head than he was in getting bombed.

It was funny but when we first went to England in 1943 we were jittery and nervous about these things. We'd heard and seen pictures. Our picture of England was one continuous bombing, night after night, relentlessly. Those first months we viewed every off-hand noise with a terrible and certain suspicion. Then, as the months passed and little if anything actually happened, we got accustomed to it. As winter came on we could even stand there unconcerned and gawk at the fireworks along with the natives. It was interesting, often exciting, so long as they were remote!

### XIII

We went on about our business in the English countryside. At night when the day's work was done for us we'd bicycle down to a little town nearby and go to the White Horse pub. It was heavily patronized by the 350th men. Particularly on Thursday nights when the week's ration of Scotch would come in. There'd be the room full of smoke, soldiers, and a few unlovely old gals and the eternal dart board with a mixed game between the natives and the Americans in progress over the heads of the rest of the people. It was a delightful evening and one which always ended in a lovely disordered fight. Someone from some other Squadron would make the remarks that the 350th was "through", "washed out". The battle would be on.

October was here. There was a series of rainy days at the first that grounded the crews and gave time to send the ground men off on a series of lectures to keep them aware of the ever-present possibilities of the use of gas. The Major's campaign to beautify the area continued, manifesting itself in the planting of grass and the laying of paths and building of fences. On a circular slab of concrete Clarence Schroepfer painted the Squadron insignia and it was laid with reverence in a space between the Orderly Room and the Operations office. The officers had since moved out of the area and lived among themselves—the flying officers, that is—in the sanctity of the WAAF site—and the Orderly Room had become a spacious large office. Things went on. Sergeant Strain had his cast changed occasionally and hobbled around on his crutches. New casual gunners joined the unit. Some flew, and others wound up in the mess halls. Paddy Blazier, the Indian, went AWOL for 12 days down in London and came back to find himself on the Victory Garden detail. Captain Scott was transferred from the unit, and life went on. The clerks

on the field tried to get another pair of wool trousers issued to them, since Colonel Curtis LeMay had decreed that all clerks must wear wool trousers during their working day. But they were denied.

The visit of Colonel LeMay (later Major General LeMay) had been something. It was about eleven o'clock one placid morning when Captain DeMarco stuck his head in the Orderly Room door and yelled that Colonel Harding, the base commander, was coming up the walk. He had no sooner gotten the words out of his mouth when the door flew open and not only Harding came in, but LeMay, then commander of the Division. LeMay was a large, full-shouldered man with a chest already beribboned colorfully, whose bearing was regal, solidly commanding. He marched in, flanked by Colonel Harding and Lt. Colonel Dungan, and a wispy little first lieutenant who flitted around silently and birdlike, attending to the Colonel's immediate desires. It seemed the Colonel would like to inspect the Squadron area. Colonel Harding had edged around to one of the clerks in the room, surreptitiously instructing him to speed through the area like a Paul Revere to spread the word so that the men could toss things out of sight and straighten up as best they could. With Captain Varian and Sergeant Kirn in tow the party set out through the area and the barracks. It was not enough to come to the 350th unannounced. But the day they chose—! It was one of the "days after" when the mud was an inch thick everywhere and the trucks had succeeded in running off the road every few feet, making a veritable mire out of the whole place. The Colonel didn't like this much and he said so. In fact, there was little that the Colonel did like. He didn't like the floors in the barracks. He didn't like the shelves in the barracks. He didn't like the barracks. He stood in front of the enlisted men's latrine, silently, disapprovingly surveying the mud hole there. It was pretty obvious he didn't like that, either. Sergeant Hays, driving like the wind, chose that moment to wheel his truck around the corner virtually on two wheels, sliding up to within a couple of feet of the Great Man. A wave of mud rose towards the Colonel. The official party closed their eyes in anguish and waited. But the mud missed. Captain Varian stole a look and shuddered. The Colonel was frowning. Hays had leaped from the truck and run into the latrine.

"Get me that man," Colonel LeMay said.

Colonel Harding said to Colonel Dungan, "Get that man", and Colonel Dungan said to Captain Varian "Get that man." Captain Varian got that man!

Hays was admonished. At the time there was a drive on to preserve tires and gasoline and vehicles were not used for personal purposes. So it was fitting that Dick Gouin should follow Hays up the road and grind to a stop at the Colonel's bidding.

"And where have you been just now?" the Colonel asked.

"Oh, to the PX to get my rations, sir," Dick announced blithely.

Captain Varian and Kirn could feel nausea gnawing at their stomachs. Colonel LeMay made a thorough and disgruntled inspection. And while he was up in the area, the Major came into the Orderly Room.

"What's cookin'?" he said.

"LeMay's looking the place over."

"Who?" The Major paused.

"LeMay. Curtis LeMay, the commanding officer of the Division." The official party had begun to come down the road towards their cars. The Major stood at the window and surveyed the scene.

"Let me know if they head this way," he said. "I don't want to get mixed up in this." He stood there and we watched poor old Varian with all his OCS training brimming forth, standing rigidly, militarily erect while LeMay outlined the errors of the day. It was a dismal scene. The Major and I alone in the room snickered at Kirn and Varian taking it out there. Then LeMay, flanked with his



Colonels and that wispy little first lieutenant, clumped off down the road to their cars and went off down the road to their next victims.

And even though everyone professed to have an utter disregard for what the renowned Colonel wanted, somehow, in the next week, the work became intensified around the area and the clerks did come to work in OD trousers. There was over all the imminent threat that the Colonel might come back. That was the goad in the sides of Varian and Kirn. Even the Major fell into their schemes.

The mail was very poor during September and October. There were long stretches of days without end when little or no mail came in from the States. The men came in from the line and from their other jobs and raced to the Mail Room only to find that the pigeon holes were bleak and empty. They heaped their curses, their abuses, their promises of reprisal on the head of Denny Polver, the long-suffering mail man, who grew a little apprehensive every time he returned from the post office with his mail sack hanging limply over one shoulder. Denny's life was a particular hell when mail didn't come in. He vainly and sincerely pleaded for an assignment in the kitchen or somewhere where people wouldn't be after him night and day. He was hot tempered and some people would accuse him of "goofing off" on the job which was the signal for his color to darken. He chattered to himself in the mail room. They baited him and he swallowed it every single time and they'd go on up the walk grinning to themselves as he jabbered and cussed in privacy.

Bad news came now and then, too. First, Marvin Wolfman lost his father, and then Don Secord lost his wife.

On the night of the 5th of October, at about eleven-thirty in the pitch night, there came the now familiar red alert. The men could see the firefly flicks of distant anti-aircraft along the coast. Then came a dull succession of heavy thudding explosions. All was quiet then and the searchlights swung around in great empty arcs against the black panel of the night sky. But the raider had gone. In the *London Times* the next day, on page 3, away down at the bottom of the page, it said simply:

"A small group of enemy raiders penetrated East Anglia last evening. Some bombs were dropped, causing little damage and no serious casualties were reported."

The Germans didn't come on the 6th. But they came again on the 7th. The first inkling the field had came not from the Tannoy system as usual but from the distant rise and fall of the air raid sirens in Diss, some five miles away, a distant, eerie, unearthly sound floating across the rolling countryside.

There was good news with the receipt of official notification that among the missing men some of them were at least prisoners of war in German hands. They were Lieutenant Duncan and his crew, Captain Carey and some of his crew, too. The Major felt awfully good about Carey. Good to know he was safe, at least.

But the most surprising and good news feature of all was in the sudden reappearance of Lieutenant Archibald Robertson who had gone down with Carey in July. Robertson suddenly turned up mysteriously in London after having made his way out of Nazi-land. It was generally a surprise because, somehow, quiet, good-natured Robertson wasn't the type whom you'd expect to emerge from such an experience through such feats of daring as he told. It was hard to place the mild-mannered man in the midst of killing and personal combat, and yet here he was. Captain Carnell went off to London to identify him and bring him back to an eagerly awaiting unit. Robertson was the first returnee. But he was close-lipped and his story remains to be told.

#### XIV

The week that followed the loss of Captain Helstrom was the black week. A turbid, reeling, wacky week that came rocketing into the Squadron and spun the organization crazily on end before it collapsed into a heap of shattered hope, the ashes of a year's work. It was Black October for the Germans, too, a week of pitiless, inexorable blows against the Reich that drove the wedge even deeper into the heart of

the enemy. They were skillful, accurate, brilliantly executed blows that brought the full measure of glory and commendation. Frankfort, Bremen, Marienburg, Munster—these were names to be conjured with—a parade of triumph and glittering achievement.

On the morning of the 8th of October—it was a Friday morning—the Major came in the Orderly Room, and, after sneaking himself a cigar out of the hospital collection, sat with his chair tilted against the wall, his feet on the desk, head sunk deep in the furry collar of his big flying jacket and that cap of his pushed on the back of his head.

He stayed there for some time, chatting, discussing the Squadron, talking with Skip Thayer who had come in, lolling around the room in that funny, little loose-jointed sort of way. Skip had received his orders to proceed to London to receive his commission as a Second Lieutenant. He had been flying as a Flight Officer. He wanted that commission. The Major was going to fly this day. Skip wasn't quite sure whether he wanted to fly or go get the commission. The Major gave him his choice. Skip decided to fly. He'd get the commission tomorrow. The Major looked pleased.

The Major stayed there for some time, chatting, shooting the bull. Finally he got up and without any formalities went out, climbed into the jeep and went on out to the ship. At eleven-thirty he roared down the runway, flying with Captain DeMarco and his crew. They sailed off over the checkerboard fields of England, out over the North Sea along the old familiar course, set for Bremen.

There were six ships flying for the Squadron that day. The Major leading in DeMarco's ship with the four new pilots making up the Squadron formation. Kramer, Walts, Meadows, Mitchell, McDonald, Nash. They were flying the high spot in the lower flank and, as they flew out across the North Sea, they kept to the Major's lead as tightly as they could. Their previous trips to Emden that week had taught them the value of sticking to the lead as closely as they could. They were taking no chances on Bremen being any different.

It seemed as if the minute they hit the coast the Luftwaffe hit them—and hard. They came down out of a bank of clouds high over the Dutch coast the first time. Coming down in their little clusters of threes and fives, diving sharply, swiping viciously at the trailing first and then, as they managed to eat these away, relentlessly and repetitiously chewing on the next group.

They were the same daring, desperate pilots that had welcomed the Group to Regensburg, to La Pallice, to Kiel—they were the same determined airmen, brave through their fear-born bravery, cold, unswerving, accurate. They hammered and jabbed furiously as the formation swept across the German skies. Now and then a gunner caught a fighter in his sights and the enemy exploded with a shattering blast, spewing bits of wreckage and flame across the sky. Now and then it was a Fort that got it, spiraling down, leaving a black plume of smoke hung tacked against the sky like an uneven question mark. Sometimes they got out of those burning ships. Like Regensburg and Hanover there'd be a second when the yellow-lapping flashes of flame could be seen inside the cabin of a nearby ship and, from the hatches, little pellets that were men would pop out; down they would spin, their chutes jutting out from behind them, first like limp towels on the end of a thread. And then a sudden flowering out, followed almost instantly by that sickening smudge against the white and the quick hiccup burst of flame. It was done. The little wriggling black dot slipping down out of sight. These were the things to know and remember the rest of your life.

The formation fought back at the fighters, forcing their way into the flak fields over Bremen. In a gigantic wheeling they made their bomb run and dropped their cards on the port. Then they turned and battled their way back towards the English countryside and home.

No one knew when it happened. No one quite knew how. Some say he went out over the target itself, in the middle of all that deadly, accurate flak and the persistent pummeling of the fighters. But no one really saw him go. Somebody said he'd gotten down safely. Another saw him get an engine hit and that awful spectre of tongues of flame licking up through the cabin. One said that one of those chutes had vomited from the plane as it heeled over and fell away from the formation. But no one could really be sure. They tried desperately to remember, but all they could remember was the fighting and the confusion, the bombs dropping and the surging sight of England coming up out of the sea to meet them. They couldn't remember!

The ship went—and with it went the prize crew as well. Benny DeMarco and flippy Skip Thayer—Skip with the big brown eyes, the guy who could have gone to London to become a Second Lieutenant instead of the Flight Officer—but who chose to fly with the Major. Downs, the navigator, and Francis Harper, the Eskimo boy, and rugged, flamboyant Jerry Ferroggiaro, the veteran about whose fantastic life the *Stars and Stripes* were even then printing a story. Barr, Stringfellow, Calhoun, Williams, all of them gone. The whole batch of them who had been flying together for almost a year. All these on one little plane that went out “somewhere around the target”. And, on the list, was the man in the co-pilot's seat—the guy the Squadron called Major.

The planes had returned to the field quite late in the afternoon. It was a crystal clear night with a clean-cut filling moon and a crimp of fall in the air. When they did come in there were vacant dispersals all around the field. They didn't come in as they usually did, in a circling cluster and then the steady descending line that came in over the fields from Harleston. Instead, they dribbled back from this one. Coming in one at a time. At each area the men stood in little knots and shivered as the night grew deeper. The moon rose a little higher and the shadows merged together all over the field. But nothing happened. Finally the men knew heavily that nothing was going to happen. They went on down the slope to the areas, to the barracks. They'd lost all four ships from the Squadron. They'd lost the Major as well.

The men didn't say much about it that night. They didn't have much to say. A few of the older men, like Riffle, whose plane the Major was flying, like Pacek and Leypoldt, fellows like that, went quietly to their barracks, changed their clothes and went out to the nearby pub and got methodically drunk. They knew him and loved him for a long time. It was their right to do this thing. There were a lot in camp who wanted to do that, too. But, somehow, in some way, some strange odd sort of way, they didn't seem to get it yet, the bulk of the men. It just didn't seem to register. This business of the Major being gone didn't sink in. A few—but the rest of them acted as if their minds had stopped at five o'clock. Just before the planes came back. They were still, somewhere down deep inside themselves, sweating out the ships, that particular ship. That was bad, awfully bad, for all of them.

For if it had only broken quickly, had plunged the morale down to the bottom right away, that would have been the best way. But it didn't. Instead, they just went on doing what they'd always done, day in and day out. The morale neither rose nor fell. It just hung there, frigidly, suspended. Nobody knew what would send it down, when the time would come, what the reaction would finally be. Because it had to go down before it could start the slow business of building up all over again. It just had to let go sooner or later.

The men went on about their work. No one talked much about what had happened. No one talked much about the Major. But they avoided looking at the vacant dispersal area by Tech Supply where his ship should have been. Each had his own personal thoughts. The legend that was Gale Cleven began to glow and



shine that night, buffed and polished by the singular, passive devotion of three hundred men who wouldn't believe he wasn't coming back.

**XV**

Missing men don't stop a war. Memory and concern can ride as well as sit and grow and so they went off again the next day towards Germany. The Germany where he was now. With their tanks full of gas and their bellies full of bombs. Their cabins and their waists and their tails full of hatred and revenge. They swung east through fighters and flak, over cities and towns, zealously guarding their bombs, eking out their gas supplies until they came to Marienburg away over towards Poland, only two hundred miles from the Russian battlefront, two hundred miles east of Berlin.

When they came over the factory, the Messerschmidt assembling plant, set in the planked fields of Prussia, they let go their bombs. Some of the incendiaries fell in the open fields a mile or so from the concentrated target and burnt away the grain. But the bulk of the bombs hit the target squarely and solidly and was hailed as the most remarkable and skilled piece of precision bombing to be accomplished in the war thus far. It was another triumph to hang beside the others, the ones accomplished and the ones to come. They all came back that day, led by Captain DeSanders, the last of the original crews. They came back from the eleven-hour flight, tired and worn. Even as they slept and tried not to dream, there were even more things to come. Black October was not yet done.

The 10th was a beautiful, lazy Sunday and the target was Munster. Munster in the Ruhr. Thirteen planes took off shortly after eleven-thirty that morning. One came back at five-thirty that afternoon. Just one. That was all. One little ship alone against the failing sky. The Group lost all the rest. The whole twelve of them. Of these there were two crews that were left to the Squadron. Thirteen planes went out—and one came back. None came back to the Squadron.

The man who did come back belonged to one of the other Squadrons, the 418th. A youngster named Rosenthal on his third mission. The others he flew on Friday and Saturday. And this was Sunday. He had come back alone. Robert Rosenthal. He couldn't remember much about what had happened on the way to Munster because he didn't know. All he had done was just fly on and on until he hit the target with the rest of the ships of other Groups in the formation. Then he'd turned and come on home. That was all he could tell.

But from other sources the story drifted across the shocked fields to the base. It had been the same old story, Luftwaffe and flak. A Colonel flying in the wing above the 100th Group told the story as best he could, shortly and simply. He had looked down on the Group and counted the thirteen ships. Twelve minutes later—twelve little odd minutes that could be spent walking a couple of blocks in a peacetime world—twelve minutes, seven hundred and twenty ticks of a second hand, later—he had looked down again. He counted just the one.

That's the story as it came back to the weary, sick-at-heart base. When the story settled in their minds and they knew it was all over, there came a great sense of fatigue, a wanting to lie down and sleep for hours on end. It was five days since the loss of Captain Helstrom. The score was seventy-one men lost and nine ships in five days. This was October 10, 1943—seventeen days until the first anniversary of the start of all this. Since the Squadron had been in England — nearly four months — actually only three months of flying—the loss was nearly two hundred percent of flying personnel and ships as well. All but some fifteen of the original men of the crews were gone and their places had been taken by new crews—crews the Squadron tried hard to know. Yet, somehow, right at this time, they weren't a part of the old Squadron. They were new and very sure of themselves. The ground men were old in their experience and not so very sure,

either. Everybody was gone and with them was the Major. It seemed very lonely and very empty around the area that starlit Sunday night.



## PART 4

October 1943 to May 1945

### I

In the days that followed the black week-end of October 8-10, there were a great many changes on the face of the 350th. Not only had the organization lost the commanding officer but, with his loss, had gone virtually all its crews. When Monday's sun came shoving up out of the North Sea, spreading across East Anglia, there wasn't much left in the 350th other than the ground force.

It was a sad lot that morning. Engineers, Armorers, Ordnance men, so driven in the last few weeks to long, dirty hours on the line now sat in their barracks disconsolately, stared moodily out of the windows into the clear plane-less skies or slept humped up on their narrow cots, dreaming of planes and bombs. When they grew tired of just silence, they began to talk idly, to fill in the vacant spaces. Some of them talked the same eternal topics. Home and women and work. But, no matter, sooner or later the real subject began to rise, to grow, to work itself into the conversation. Who was going to replace the Major? Who was going to take on the job of succeeding the man they missed. It was a hard question. The men knew it. They knew that the man, whoever he was, would have to be a strong man. He'd have to step into a hornet's nest. Strong as he might be he'd have to be that much stronger to be able to stay. They wondered who it would be. Few had any ideas.

During the temporary period when there was no commanding officer at the head of the Squadron the place was nominally filled by the Operations officer, Captain Mark Carnell. Long, lean and lank, easy going, personable. The men liked Carnell. There were a good many who began to accept it for a fact that Carnell would be the logical successor to Cleven. But they reckoned without the requisite fact that the CO must be an active flying man as well. Carnell had been in combat flying for several missions but the strain and his lack of physical strength had curtailed his activities. Carnell had chosen to retire to more routine flying, instructing in his position as Operations officer. The fact that the Commanding Officer of the unit was called on to lead the entire group in missions almost precluded the fact that Carnell would ever be permanently named to the spot.

In the Army there is always someone around to fill an empty place. Monday passed with nothing but a string of rumors. Tuesday, the rumor started in the Mess Hall where, contrary to all beliefs, all good and true Army rumors begin. It came down the tables and most of the men began to realize they were on the trail of the truth. Someone leaned over to someone else and said "I heard the new CO is Captain Elton of the 418th." That's all there was to it. A few of the men were already in possession of the truth. They heard the rumor coming down the chow line and raised their eyebrows, keeping their mouths shut.

Captain Albert Elton, Operations officer of the 418th Squadron, a man generally known to the Group but unknown to the 350th, was named officially as the new Commanding Officer, officially assuming command on Tuesday, October 11.

The following day Elton stood by my desk.

"This place gives me the willies. Makes me feel like Rebecca." He walked over to the window and stood looking out over the area. I knew what he meant. I remembered the DuMaurier story of the second wife who fought against the memories of the first wife. I was glad he'd said that. It showed he knew what

we all were feeling somehow. He knew we remembered freshly, painfully. I knew that if he knew these things and could remember them his way might be a little easier.

He was a little man, very tiny—tiny boned and slight in frame. His manner boyish, spiced with a little of that peculiar cockiness that belongs to men of small stature.

He came out of his office and walked around the Orderly Room, his hands in his rear pockets, his battle jacket hunched up on his shoulders. He walked around a great deal in those first days, a nervous, quick, little cat-pace, a sort of undecided, restless pacing. Now and again he'd stop at the window and stare out over the area that was his as though he were trying to get used to the feel of the place. He gave the impression of passionately wanting to get acquainted in a hurry and not knowing just how to do it. Sometimes after he'd walked himself weary he'd pull up a chair and sit astraddle the seat with his arms folded, resting on the back. He'd talk about things, his life before the Army, the Army, and himself.

He was just a shade older than the rest, older in years, older in experience and he had outgrown the reckless spirit and come into a respectful, careful deference where planes were concerned. He was determined to follow the dictates of his own conscience.

The black week-end had come. Suddenly Eagen and Cleven were not around any more. And Veal went away to take a staff job at Wing Headquarters and as suddenly, almost unexpectedly, Elton's name came up on orders. He packed up and moved from Site 2 to Site 4 and the 350th. Here he was, sitting astraddle the collapsible wooden chair with his crossed arms leaning on the upraised backs, telling his story. Albert Elton, Bucky to his friends, Squadron commander.

As I have said, he was a tremendously little man. I stress that because it was hard to imagine how a man of such slight stature could handle a B-17, which taxed the energies of the men who towered above him. But when you asked him, he'd grin and drawl—"I've learned the short cuts!" He was a flier, that was his interest and his objective. Yes, he'd led the Group before and would in the days to come and apparently did a good job of it, from the accounts that came back. But he made no bones about expressing his dislike of daring the flak fields and the fighters; his missions were flown because they had to be flown, not because they were challenging in the least. He suffered annoyance when he was told he was to fly and went through acute preflight nervousness every time. England had bad weather a good part of the time and as winter closed in flying days became fewer and farther between. But they were never too few nor too far between to please the little Commander. But he'd slosh on his way when his turn had come, climb into his plane and lead the mission successfully over its course, grumbling every air mile of the way.

He had good reason for his apprehension. Cleven and Eagen were good enough reasons for anybody. They had dared to fly too many missions, they were the eager-beavers and they were gone. They were skilled pilots, as skilled as they came, but to Elton they had a flaw. That was that over-eagerness to fly. They had, as a direct result of it, paid the price. He resolved firmly and coldly that he was not going to be another "eager beaver." He wasn't. He had one resolution made for himself by himself—that was to be cautious, careful and sure. Whatever he was to do in the future was to be predicated precisely on that point alone. He was going to finish up his missions on this side of the Channel and then pack up and go back to the States.

He brought to the Squadron something new. Something they didn't quite understand with the memories of the dashing, swashbuckling Major still large and present. He brought personal caution and reserve against the remembered to-hell-with-it fire and brilliance of a cavalier pilot. They didn't quite know what



it was they didn't understand about Elton so they waited and watched and talked it over on the line, in the clubs and mess halls, in the barracks, among themselves.

## II

Elton had his flying on his mind. He was occupied with that. He wanted no more of the work of the Commanding Officer than that which concentrated on the air side of the picture. The ground men and the administration he left to Captain Varian with his supervision. At first, during those first days of his new regime, he moved a little unsteadily. He had waited a long time. Undoubtedly in his mind were certain features which he had felt he would put into practice if ever the opportunity came to him. He believed in military courtesy. He had threatened to court-martial the first man who did not salute him the following day. Nothing ever came of it. It died out shortly.

He was a little uncertain too, as to the proper course to follow in setting up his relationship with the men of the command. His problem was not in the beginning with the air echelon, for it will be remembered that that branch was virtually non-existent when he came in, and when, several days later, the replacement crews came in it meant that he had them under his initial control from the start. His main problem was the initial establishment of a relationship with the men of the ground echelon, the engineers, the armorers, the ordnance, communications, cooks, general duty men, clerks—all of these who had known the Major intimately, who had sworn by him. These were the men to whom he had to sell himself. He knew it. They knew it.

All these things were transpiring within the actual ordinary movement of the field. In fact, the day before he joined the unit, one lone plane from the Squadron participated in the mission over Schweinfurt, an epic-making flight commended by all Army departments. The day this mission was set the morale of the Group was low as a result of the deadly Sunday when only one ship had returned out of thirteen. But the mission was set in spite of this and Brigadier General Frederick Anderson came to the field to personally fly with the remaining crews in an effort to show his confidence and trust in their ability. Such a gesture was a proud and gallant one and did much to aid the restoration of general confidence and a looking forward to the future from what seemed at the time the bottom of the pile.

On the 20th of October they took a quick poke at Duren and then bad weather, coupled with inoperational crews, grounded the Group for the rest of the month.

In the meantime a problem had come up within the Squadron. The Group's first anniversary was to be celebrated on the 27th of October and a series of events had been planned for the week, among them the Squadron's first anniversary party. The prime question was, of course, whether to go ahead with the plans and have the dance in face of the huge losses—or to cancel the affair. The general decision was to proceed with the party as planned and so they went ahead.

Bill Jackson, Ben Garber, and Jim Carlton planned the Club decorations, grabbing every bit of stray colored paper and ribbon that could be found in London, Ipswich and Norwich, and the surrounding countryside. They strung their ribbons and pasted their paper around the club. Clarence Schroepfer and Homer Parker got busy with their spray guns and sprayed grey B-17's on the walls and black out boards and hung a great blue tapestry at the end of the dance floor which read with stenciled gold letters—"350th Bomb Squadron—October 27, 1942-1943". The night came and the men of the Squadron and the girls of the Norfolk countryside filed into the Niessen hut club and the party was on.

Louis Hays, Dick Hawkins and Willis Douglass had managed to unearth a civilian baker in one of the little towns, who, for a sum, managed to whip up a

cake with Army ingredients that stunned the imagination. Tiered in sections and surmounted with a model Flying Fortress the cake was first admired and then after being cut by Pat and Betty, the Red Cross girls, it was devoured in haste and savoring enjoyment.

During the course of the evening Captain Elton arrived and Jim Carlton seized the opportunity to introduce him to the Squadron as a whole. Jim clambered up on the bar and made his announcement and they boosted Elton up alongside the six-foot Calton so the men of the 350th could see their new CO. There was, as was known, a terrific speculation about him and now they could see what he looked like, what he sounded like and what he was like. He met his men from the bar of the old officers' club.

Later in the evening they herded all the men onto the dance floor and Sergeant Kirn got up on the bandstand and made a short speech of his own.

"He's a swell guy," he said. "We want him to know we appreciate him."

He handed Captain Varian the gold cigarette case the men had chipped in to buy.

Kirn spoke a little more and Captain Blazer, the engineering officer, came forward and received his gift from the boys on the line. Captain Elton had a good time. Long after the party had broken up and the men had ridden, walked, staggered back to the area, Captain Elton sat at the piano beating out the blues or taking some hot licks at the drums, both of which he did right well.

✓ Captain Elton had assumed command on the 11th. On the 13th the new replacement crews came in and set to work flying practice missions, going to their trainer classes, aircraft identification classes and all the rest. Gradually they assumed their operational status and by the first of November they were ready for their own beginning up the ladder. It took twenty-five missions to complete a tour. After that it meant home. The Squadron had been in England now five months and no one had gone home yet. Two men had nearly twenty missions. All the rest had plenty to go. What looked like a breeze in June—wasn't quite that—in November.

Six full crews went up on the 3rd of November in the fresh crisp morning and made for the North Sea lanes again. They went over to converge on Wilhelmshaven and dump their load thoroughly through an overcast on the submarine pens. Flak was moderate and more or less accurate and there were only a few of the Luftwaffe strength present, due no doubt to the large and effective P-47 escort.

On the 5th the ships were set to take-off at 0730, but the fogs held them on the ground until 0930 when seven crews from the Squadron joined the Group and climbed up to their positions in the sky. It was a bitterly-cold day and the vapor trails against the blue looked like white comet tracks. For over an hour they wheeled and paraded, peppering the morning skies with little arcing flare tracks. Finally they headed almost due east to a little spot in Germany in the Ruhr Valley—known to the fliers as "Flak Valley"—where they attempted to hit a synthetic rubber and gasoline plant.

"The flak was intense", wrote a pilot in his diary. "Twelve ships aborted. There were only five in the high squadron where we flew. Fighters were numerous but well-occupied by our P-47's and Spitfires. After 'bombs away' three of the ships in front of us in our Squadron were hit by flak and left the formation. Immediately after, our number four engine was hit in the oil tank by flak. We feathered it and attempted to stay up with the formation on three engines. Then our number two engine was hit by flak, which we later found to be badly torn on the bottom cylinder. We started a long descent on two engines and due to P-47 escort were not attacked by fighters. Six P-47's circled over our plane until we passed over the enemy coastline. We flew into the home base on two engines, through an overcast, and made a perfect landing. That was a hot mission!"

Their bomb load had been deposited, not on the plants, but in the middle of

a field some distance from the target. They'd brought a full share of misery to some farmer that day—or helped him immeasurably with his winter plowing.

Two days later they went out for another crack at Duren which had been an unsuccessful target on the 20th of October. They meshed themselves together in formation with Captain Elton leading the Group with Captain DeSanders, Elton's chum, in a ship that carried more than its share of armor plating and protective covering.

It was a beautiful day and the sky was pimpled with little white molecule clouds and below them as they flew along they could see the earth beneath laid out for their inspection like a giant bas-relief. After they had flown for some time, Elton, leading his formation abreast of the Wing Commander, spied, through an open break a perfect target not more than five miles from the spot. A big war plant near Cologne, with the smoke plumbing from the towering stacks. A great, beautiful hunk of target just waiting for the load of bombs and incendiaries. Elton hastily grabbed the radio phone and contacted the Wing CO.

"Lemme get that one," he said, choking with his own excitement at the prospect.

"No." The Wing Commander was firm and positive. Elton would stay with the formation and proceed to the scheduled target. Elton cast a lingering glance at the receding gem and then carried on in the run. They crossed the target and dropped their bombs and then wheeled and came on back. Elton was furious and his annoyance hung with him long after he had led the Group home and shucked his flying togs to take up the unexciting role of a ground CO again.

"It was a perfect one," he said ruefully. "And he wouldn't let me go get it." And he'd look around the room, uncomprehending, irritated, his eyebrows shoved up towards the center of his forehead in a questioning, annoyed peak.

### III

Armistice Day came to a Europe that tried to forget it. The British government made an announcement tacitly that there would be no observance of the day officially.

On the post there was no change from the ordinary routine and the planes warmed up for another mission. November looked like a busy month. The target was Munster. The raid was abortive—no soap!

This was the November when the Italian war was booming up from the south. Italy had formally, but inconsequentially, surrendered and Count Sforza had returned to his country from the United States. Bodaglio was crying for the removal of Victor Emmanuel, Mussolini had made his appearance in the far north of Italy and now and then the press carried some announcement of an ineffectual speech he made over the air under the auspices of the Fuehrer. The war came up through Italy slowly.

In the east the Russians stirred behind the German winter line and there were signs that the Bear was getting restless. Churchill and Roosevelt had their Quebec conference.

Irving Berlin's "This Is the Army" came to England to the Palladium and scored a magnificent success. Tickets were at a premium throughout the run, but some of the men saw the performance. The men kept on washing their OD's in 100 percent octane on the line and pressing their clothes in the barracks.

Some of the men went to Scole and made arrangements with the Land Army girls—on a platonic basis, of course—and others stayed on the field, went to the movies, or to the Red Cross club in the evenings. When their pass would come up they'd pack their toilet articles in their little Red Cross bags, catch the eight-ten out of Diss to London to spend their time at shows, dancing out at Hammersmith or Covent Garden, or they'd have their special friends, by now, to spend the evenings and the days with. And no matter what they did, what they said they did, or where they'd been—the eight-twelve out of Liverpool Street Station always carried its full quota of men whose blue-rimmed blood-shot eyes, ashen pallor and decided sleepiness testified



that, whatever had been their choice, they'd gone into it wholeheartedly. And now, exhausted, they were willing to return to the field and to their work for some rest!

Restrictions came on such things as riding bicycles without tail lights, stepping off the road into the grass, not saluting officers and the like. Life was getting hard and rugged in the ETO.

Christmas was still a month or so away but the packages mailed from home between September and October 15 began to arrive the first few weeks in November in great and staggering amounts, doing little good to Denny Polver's disposition. The men eagerly grabbed their gifts and tore them open on the weak premise that if there was any perishable food in them it would (1) not last out the ravages of the mice around the camp or (2) spoil. The fact that much of the gift boxes did not contain food—was incidental. Their curiosities were satisfied.

#### IV

On the morning of the 13th the target was Bremen. The same old Bremen that had already received a lion's share of bombs from both the USAAF and the RAF.

They took off early in the morning and followed up along the Holland coast and then skirted the northern tip of the German coast out into the broader and safer expanses of the North Sea.

It had been decided that when the formations had arrived at a certain predesignated spot they would turn and come in at the target from a northwest to southeast direction. They missed the point entirely and proceeded farther in an easterly direction until when they finally did turn they were forced to come into the target from a northeasterly to southwesterly position. This was accomplished without incident and Bremen caught the weight of the load as scheduled.

The miracle of the mistake lay in the fact that the German High Command had apparently learned of the attempt on Bremen in some manner and had sent a full fighter force north of Bremen to intercept the oncoming Forts. Had the planes gone through as scheduled the formations would have been unmercifully cut up. As the situation worked out, however, the Forts circumvented the plan and came in on the target behind the waiting fighter bands, crossed the area to a minimum dose of flak and came on out of Germany, crossing Holland, back to England.

Two days later they were charted for another long flight. The first since they had gone out after Marienburg. They lined up on the perimeter track before the sun rose that morning. The wings strained with gas, the Tokios were on again. They took off in the black night while the linesmen stood and watched them go. The men went back to the area, to their barracks to sleep and wait. Now and then one of the ships would fly over their heads, the four superchargers glowing softly with a reddish-yellow hue, making four little round spots against the black under-surface of the wing.

The planes followed up over the North Sea, tracing their way along the Norwegian coast line—three months after they had made their historic flight to Trondheim.

This time the target was a little town by the name of Rjukan and as the ships cruised along above the Norwegian territory the crews could look down on the deep-cut fjords and the shaggy, snow-clad crags of the mountains. The trip moved along without incident and the planes finally came in sight of the target. There was little flak and fighter opposition was restrained and negligible. One or two German fighters sat outside the run and watched them speculatively as though they would like to take a crack or two. But they knew too well what the murderous fire could do to them.

Over Rjukan and its giant electrical plant they cut loose with their load. Down on the plant, on the little town rained incendiaries and explosives and as the Forts turned away from their work they could see towers of smoke pushing up into the cold Norwegian sky. Objective scored.

From a diary the following—

"Today we hit Gelsenkirchen, synthetic gas and rubber factory in the Ruhr. (This was the 19th). We flew 792, a spare ship in the Squadron. One of the guns in the chin turret was inoperative, otherwise the plane worked well until we were over the Zuider Zee. At that time the oxygen equipment for the pilot, top turret gunner and navigator froze and allowed it to immediately leak out to a pressure of twenty-five pounds. We turned around and came back at two-hundred miles per hour indicated, losing altitude all the way. Dropped our bombs in the North Sea. We encountered some terrifically accurate flak as we crossed the enemy held coast though none of it actually hit our plane. The other planes couldn't get to the target as there was a solid overcast over it. They dropped their bombs "somewhere in Germany." As we took off I looked over towards the 96th Bomb Group's field and saw a huge pillar of flame rising. I later learned that it was at Rongsted and Strawn had crashed with a full bomb load and killed the whole crew. They got in the propwash of the plane in front of them and tried to turn too quickly after they had taken off and at too low an airspeed with a loaded plane. Hard luck!"

Several days after this incident the crews were placed on an "alert" status one early evening. The morning of the 23rd the crews were awakened and attended the briefing and awakened even more when they heard the target. When they came out of the room their faces hinted their secret and its importance. At last, it was Berlin. Big B. For the first time they were going to try and hit it in broad daylight, though the RAF had been going after it for some time in the early black hours of the morning. This was monumental.

The take-off was set for 0730, but as the time approached there was an unexplained delay. Suddenly the mission was scrubbed. Fifteen minutes after the scrubbing the entire field was restricted to the confines of the post indefinitely. This restriction embraced the ground personnel as well as the air personnel and sure enough, fifteen minutes later the gates had clanged shut on Station 139. No one was allowed to leave the post. Though the English and Irish workers, contractors and laborers, and the civilian population who lived within the confines of the field came and went as usual without restriction—and yet they must have known what was cooking, since rumor and gossip were common. The restriction was imposed to safeguard the secret of the morning. Not more than four or five hours later the entire unit was called to assembly by order to listen to Major—yes, he had made his majority by now—Major Elton as he tried to outline the reasons for the restriction and the very necessary charge of security, not only for this mission target, but on all questions of military matter.

And so the men sat and sweated it out. Meantime Wednesday passed and Thursday came. It was a cold, bitter, clear Thanksgiving Day Thursday and though business went on as usual—they had a practice mission that afternoon—at twelve o'clock there was a tremendous line from the Mess Hall down the road with a lot of hungry men whose minds were full of the promise of turkey and all the fixins.' They got their turkey—ratio: 60 per cent turkey, 40 percent pork—and they got cakes and pumpkin pie and all the rest of the things that went into a real Thanksgiving dinner. Lieutenant Seibert—whose Mess Hall was often called "Seibert's Folly"—had with his cooks and KP's, done himself proud. The men stuffed themselves to the gills and then painfully marched themselves back to the area or out to the line to go right on working. It was a grand meal—and business as usual—on Thanksgiving Day.

They kept right on sweating out the pass restriction. On Friday morning it was lifted and the men started filing down the road to Diss and London. The ships went out to France that day and poured their explosives down on an airport installation near Paris, hazarded by the constant harrying of German pursuits, who bedeviled them to the target and then back to the Channel coast.

V

November was a month of renewed hope of victory, for it was November when the RAF streaked across the English skies in the early evening to plow their way across Germany in their Halifaxes and their Lancasters to rain down on Berlin night after night the unbelievable tons of bombs. The papers and the radio were full of reports of the damage and the terror that was Berlin. The radio and press began to pass on the threats of the German High Command that the time was almost right for the beginning of the "secret weapon" so long touted and so long delayed. The Germans threatened and verbally shook their fists at England and their tenor was that the rest of the world be damned, England would pay for this monstrous abuse and misery she was bringing to Berlin. Now and then there'd be a red alert and in the very far distance there might be the sound of an exploding bomb or two, but this was surely not the reprisal that was promised. The Russian Bear had come to life, after all, and was beginning to run rampant through the German winter line, now threatening the Pripet Marshes and the whole of the eastern front. Invasion talk became stronger and signs began to show that perhaps there was more to it than just talk. The men going into London on pass began to see more unfamiliar uniforms on the streets. Paratroopers, tank men, amphibious forces . . . segments of the British Army up from Italy. All of them were guarded and close with their talk. The rails grew more and more congested and all forms of public convenience began to clog. Delays became more frequent. There was something in the air. Berlin threatened their secret weapon. General rumor said the weapon was a rocket gun that would fire from the French coast across the channel aimed at London a hundred miles away. Berlin wouldn't say. They just promised. The girth of England strained under the growing population as the Americans and Christmas came along together.

During the month of November there had been an alarming rise in the rate of venereal disease again on the post and most of the causes seemed to come out of the fetid London area. It was plain that some measure should be taken to block any further increase in the rate.

Deciding to kill two birds with one stone—though all the officers had a hang-over from their party the night before—Captain Varian and Major Elton took it into their heads to present Air Medals and Oak Leaf Clusters at a meeting primarily for VD information. There was the presentation—first—so that it wouldn't detract from the more serious nature of the meeting. Then getting down to facts, Chaplain Glen Teska talked to the men, telling them what was expected from them on the spiritual side of the picture. Then Captain Hardy, the Squadron Surgeon, spoke briefly on the physical side of the problem, rolling into the subject like a bull-dozer, flaying and ripping, making his point with wit and very blunt language. He had made a similar speech—the same one almost word for word—the year before and this one was no less in intensity and color. The men gasped, laughed, flushed and listened.

Major Elton then, as CO, got up, spoke shortly and to the point. He cited examples and bluntly called his card straight from the shoulder. It was evident that he was most sincere in his words—no man would have made such a speech unless he had been so. The men paid close attention. The room was very still.

November. Missions, wars on other fronts, fun, restrictions, and work. This was November. And suddenly it wasn't November any more and the men began to think a little more of home and Christmas. December came of age, cold and wet and English.

VI

On the 3rd of December, 1943, from a passage in a diary—

"Today was a lucky one for me, although I have had a good many lucky ones since coming here. Especially do I remember the day we sweated out ditching in the North Sea on the way back from Denmark and the time over Paris when flak came through the nose. Fletcher was flying with one of the new crews today and they



crashed coming in for a landing. The nose was completely torn away and they got the bombardier and the navigator out, both seriously hurt. Had I not had my tooth pulled yesterday and consequently grounded for a couple of days I would have been up there with them. Fletcher wasn't hurt, but is staying up at the Dispensary tonight for he did have a slight case of shock. He has changed much since we started going on missions, the first Bremen raid did something to him and I imagine that the accident today will do even more. By the time we finish our tour he will probably be one of those young men with an old man's face. The new pilot was landing the ship so he will not have that with which to blame himself. They were flying our plane 791, which had taken us on six missions. But it has flown its last, for it was a complete smashup. The boys are alerted for a raid in the morning. We are afraid it might be either Berlin or Paris, neither of which is a pleasing prospect. With Fletcher, Whitton and Reid in the hospital and me grounded and no airplane, the crew won't be flying this time unless they really get it bad and we have to fill in. In the background tonight you can hear the engines. I used to think that the most mournful sound in the world was the whistle of a freight train in the distance in the middle of the night, but I have changed my mind. It is the hum of the engines on the flight line. While you lie in your bed and look into the darkness and wonder whether or not you'll be coming back tomorrow."

## VII

December was in. It was a funny thing. The men didn't seem to mind the long, wearisome hours, the cold and the exhausting jobs—just so the planes kept on their business of bombing. But how many times they had to work and load and then watch the planes go off—only to be recalled to the field to unload the bombs all over again. The work of the whole night undone and fruitless. These were the days of low morale. The days of meaningless waste of energy and spirit. When it happened most of the men said very little. Now and then one or two would grumble and complain, but mainly they said nothing. You'd notice it in their eyes. That tired, defeated weariness. That look that wasn't there when the planes carried out their missions as scheduled.

The men of the ground had been here for seven months now. They began to show it. In little off-hand ways, but show it, nevertheless. There were little thin lines of fatigue creeping in around their eyes and the corners of their mouths. The ETO was beginning to make its mark. The Major moved quietly and softly and began to be accepted as the second Commander. He moved slowly and without much fuss and watched his own personal skies over England. And Christmas came rushing up out of the cold, long days. That same Christmas that the chief Chaplain of the ETO had said that we'd be home by!

On the night of the 17th the Germans came in along about the midnight hours to pelt Ipswich with their advance Xmas greetings. In the frigid night sky the searchlights weaved and picked, trying to find the intruders. The defenders of Ipswich peppered the skies low in the south with the brilliant pin-point flashes of their flak. And now and then, midway in the sky, there would appear at first a little spark. A spark that grew steadily until it looked as though a ball of fire were suspended against the black backdrop of the English winter night. Suddenly, the suspension was broken. The ball of fire would curve slowly, arcing downwards, tracing a trail of glowing embers before snuffing out. A second later and the whole of the southern sky would light and glow under the impact of the crashing Jerry raider. Then darkness and nothing but the sparkle and the wink of the flak flashes as they struck up at still another plane. The men of the Squadron stood in the area, on the raised sides of the air raid shelter, anywhere the view of the south towards Ipswich was clear and unobstructed, and watched the show in silence.

After a while the flak thinned and the rumble of the distant guns died away slowly and the raiders passed. The men shivered in the silence and the cold and went

back into the warmer barracks and their beds.

Christmas week meant the mails grew heavier still and choked with the later arrivals of the Christmas packages from the States. Polver struggled valiantly with the mess, sorting the packages out, laying them in neat piles outside the mail room where the men could pick up their gifts.

Christmas Eve was clear and very cold. That evening Chapel services were held and the Red Cross managed to give a party in the Aeroclub. All around the field men captured the spirit of Christmas as best they could. It seemed that each star gleamed over the field with its own individual brilliance as though each one wanted to usurp the place of the Bethlehem star just for that particular night.

At nine o'clock over the loud-speaker system came the sounds of the old, familiar carols, sung by a male quartette. The songs floated over the stillness and crept out of the confines of the camp and down into the little villages outside the bounds of the field. For a little moment it was not England and Americans in England, but Christmas and peace and everyone close and native and a little sad. It was Christmas, 1943.

For the bulk of the men their second Christmas away from home. Their first away from the States.

Christmas day was like most of the other days in the year. The men worked in the morning and at noon lined up at the Mess Hall for the Christmas meal, sumptuous and lavish and filling. They gorged themselves. Christmas hadn't been too bad, not too bad, after all. Maybe, by the next one, we'd be home again.

## VIII

On the morning of the 29th of December the news was announced of the appointment of General Dwight Eisenhower to be the Supreme Allied Commander for the long-dreamed of invasion forces in Western Europe. Other appointments came that morning as well. General James Doolittle to replace General Eaker as head of the Eighth Air Force and General Spaatz to be head of the air picture of the coming planned operations. The men of the unit joined the rest of the world in looking towards the future. They began to talk and wonder about the Second Front. But on the morning of the 29th of December there was only Eisenhower and the men felt good knowing he was top man. They remembered North Africa and Sicily. It sounded good.

While December was edging past, what of the air crews? They had worked steadily as usual. On the 5th they'd been on an abortive mission to Bordeaux and then on the 11th it had been Emden's docks again. Then came Kiel and Bremen twice and then on the 14th a wave of expectancy swept the field, for they were briefed again for Berlin. But this, like the previous time, was withdrawn and the mission had been scrubbed. Then two raids on Bremen and good old Munster of October days caught its Christmas present on the 22nd. On Christmas Eve the squadron flew over the channel to the French coast and paid the first of many visits to come to the secret "no-ball" target. No-ball target. Secret, concealed, unknown except to the top strategists who mapped out the missions and listed the targets. It was the no-ball target. No one asked questions. It was simply a mission to France. Nothing more.

The morning of the 30th they went off on the arduous journey to Ludwigshaven, down near the Swiss border, where they struck at aircraft factories with success. And they brought the year to a close with a raid New Year's Eve on Paris itself. This was their heaviest month. They got shot up a little now and then, but they always returned the next time in full strength. It was the end of 1943 and the beginning of 1944 and the Squadron had not lost a ship since the middle of October. It was January, 1944, and General Eisenhower came out and said flatly—

"We will win the war in 1944."

It began suddenly to look easier. Perhaps Eisenhower was right. There was a hunk of days and weeks that made up a year. Everyone forgot to reckon on the fact

that the Germans were still sitting cocky on the shores of the North Sea and the English channel. Not so far away. A hundred miles or so. So it was 1944.

With the coming of the new year came also a number of sweeping changes in personnel. Though the change was gradual and unmarked in the greatest sense, nevertheless it was a change that eventually resulted in a new picture of the unit being formed. The first of these changes came on the 5th of January when Captain Varian was transferred to Group Headquarters to take up the job as Station Adjutant. This was brought about by the fact that the original Station Adjutant, Major Standish, was moved up into the Station Group Executive's job. Handsome Horace had a chance for bigger things. It would be foolish and incorrect to say that his going was immaterial to the bulk of the men in the unit. In fact, his going was a shock and a serious blow to that "old feeling" that lay within the unit. Since October, 1942, when the unit had been formed, Captain Varian had been sitting in the Adjutant's chair, administrating, growing with the unit. He had been the number 2 man in line with Major Cleven and, since the Major's disappearance, he had the double task to handle of being the number one man as well. The men felt that as long as Varian was still with them the Major was, too, somehow. But now he was leaving them. Not to leave the field—but leaving them, nevertheless. They knew it was a good break for Varian. Most of them wanted to see him get the breaks. But they knew that they would miss him as well. He closed out his desk and moved on up the ladder. In his place there was Captain Robert H. Tienken, who, since the activation, had been serving as the Squadron supply officer as well as assistant adjutant. The men knew him well, through the supply room. At least, it was not a stranger who took Varian's place. It was still in the family.

The day that Varian went to Group the air crews flew out to Hues, Germany and pasted bombs deep in the heart of the target. Two days later they struck at Ludwigshafen and the aircraft factories there again.

Towards the middle of January three men came back to the Squadron after having been shot down in Belgium on the Regensburg raid of August 25. Lts. James Bormuth and Raymond Nutting, who had flown with Lieutenant Claytor, and Sergeant John Burgin. They were under orders to maintain a strict silence about their activities on the continent. Suffice to say that they were welcomed home and, after a short lay-over on the field, they proceeded back to their homes in the States.

On the fifteenth good news came around. The men were granted furloughs of seven-day duration and the first bunch took off in a blaze of glory and excitement. Every two or three days would see a few men take off for a week in London or Edinburgh or somewhere where they had been unable to go previously because of the distances involved. The men who went to London for the week were generally the ones who "had connections there," while the bulk of the men went to Edinburgh, up in Scotland, and returned with glowing comment that sent the others off northwards when their time for leave came rolling around.

The weather had grown colder with the coming of the new year and now and then there would be a flurry of snow that laid on the ground for a short spell. Mainly it was just plain cold—damp and cold.

Between the 14th and the 20th of January the weather turned very bad and the ships were grounded. Captain Carnell, who was still holding down the operations office, managed finally to get what he wanted. He left the unit and went to a testing field to become a test pilot. His place was taken by Major Elton's closest associate, Captain William DeSanders. DeSanders and Elton were thick buddies and you rarely saw one without the other—big, tall, DeSanders following the little light-footed Elton everywhere they went.

Towards the end of January the Squadron took on a number of men who were simply attached, not assigned, to the unit, pending the formation of a new Group, to be known as the 493rd Bomb Group. The men came to the unit and stayed



there simply for rations and administrations, working around, waiting for the call to the new Group.

Now came a spirit of unrest in the minds of some of the men. They had been in this spot for eight months and for most of them it was as long as they had been in any one spot since they had been in the Army. This was their assigned place and here most would stay. Doing the work that the Army had trained them for. Louis Hays and Dick Hawkins had been mulling over the idea of becoming aviation cadets. They put in their applications and went down before the aviation cadet board in London and came back to their armament jobs to sweat out the results.

Now and then the ships got off on a mission and then came back to be fouled in for a few days before they'd get another chance. On the 11th they went out to Osnabruck, Germany, and on the 14th and 21st they struck at Crossbow. On the 24th it was Frankfurt. On the morning of the 29th they charted Frankfurt again. The weather was muddy and the visibility obscure. The Squadron's planes joined the Group for the early mission, take-off scheduled for 0615. One of the planes, piloted by Lt. Lloyd Marks, had just left the runway. In a moment the plane plunged down, striking the ground solidly. The whole ship went up in flames, the cargo of incendiaries and explosives peppering the dark early morning. For a minute or two the whole of the western sky was fused into a dull reddish glow. The field ambulance and fire wagon raced off to the scene and when they got there they stumbled around the little shattered woods where the ship had struck, finding the bodies of the men who had been tossed and thrown from the crash. Lt. Richard Powell was found dead, as were the six enlisted men on the crew, Albert DeGregorio, Joseph Makowski, Charles Challoner, Joseph Silvani, Robert Dean and Raymond Schier. Three of the crew were miraculously thrown clear. Lt. Marks, the pilot; Lt. Wesley Lundholm and T/Sgt. Maurice Anderson. How they did escape, even they could not say. But, even though seriously injured, all three, they did escape. It had been a shocking accident—in a winter that had been full of them.

January came to an end. The missions were completed on the last day when the ships took on Brunswick in north central Germany to good effect and came back without loss. The Russians had begun a westward move through the frozen steppes and in Italy the Allies had established a beachhead at a place called Anzio. Cassino and its monastery lay in the pathway to Rome and the world watched as the men of the infantry dug into mud and slush and waited for the world to give up sentiment and theory and get to bombing the ancient church at the head of the hill. The Luftwaffe began to come again over Eastern England. Red alerts came more frequently. And down in London the sirens wailed and the battered capital rocked now and then from the Germans' futile attempts to set the city on fire. The men coming back from the city told of a new anti-aircraft gun—rockets. But those who hadn't seen them disbelieved the stories. It was February.

## IX

February was a nasty, rainy, snowy month with the winds sweeping down off the North Sea across the face of East Anglia. Throughout the month the men came and went on their furloughs, going flush with their saved or borrowed pounds and shillings, coming back with a pence or two left over—if they were lucky. But they came back satisfied and worn out after their week in London or Edinburgh or as in the case of Max Kushner or John Thompson—they spent their time with relatives in the country.

The Germans stepped up their prowling activities with the coming of February. They came in good strength, dropping oil bombs and incendiaries and now and then a big crushing blockbuster into the center of London. Men came back from their furloughs and passes and talked in big-eyed excitement about the fires and the explosions, planes shot down and that something new that had been added—the rocket

guns. Captain Varian, Lt. Bowers and Captain McMahon stood out their pass on the corner of Shaftesbury and Picadilly Circus, shuddering with each blast as the bombs came thundering down. Bowers clung to Varian and McMahon to Bowers and all to each other. They came back to the field with preposterous tales and with Bowers swearing that he'd never go to London again—he put in for his leave immediately to Edinburgh—quiet, queen city of the north.

I was in London the night the big bomb fell across from St. James Palace at the foot of St. James Street. It fell, hitting the earth heavily and then ripping and roaring in a huge explosion that tore a gutted crater in the midst of the city block. Oil bombs were falling all over the city and the din of the anti-aircraft rang up and down the streets, tinkling with the spatter of anti-aircraft shells. Suddenly a great field of flame-colored jags rose softly and silently in the air. A great field of points sailed up into the sky and all those little pin points of red exploded with a brilliant, blinding, shocking flash and a roar that shook the buildings in the odd light of the flares that hung above the city. These were the rockets! Any ship that was caught in the middle of that murderous field of explosives was automatically doomed. It was a beautiful raid! Like the Fourth of July! I stood and "oh-d" and "ah-d" as each field of rocket shells floated up so easily and gently to become a frightening exploding field over Hyde Park.

The weather rose and fell with varying intensity. Snow came and lay heavier this month. The thatched roofs in the village, the fields, the roads and the airfield sparkled and glistened until the stuff melted. Then the dampness took over and the men shivered in their beds and slipped down farther under the blankets to try and evade the chill. When the snow lay too deeply on the runways, the men had to go out and shovel and scrape it away so that the ships might take off. The bulk of the men, too, had to get up in the nights that were slippery and cold and go on out to work as usual. It wasn't much fun for anyone.

The flying was poor this month. On the whole they managed to keep up a pretty fair average, hitting at Wilhelmshaven, Frankfurt, Villa Coublay, Everaux, Brunswick, Crossbow, Arnimswalde, Rostock and even Regensburg again—this time a routine trip with only the memory of the pioneering flight of six months previous to remind them. On the 20th they took off, Tokios filled and ready for a long flight, to Poznan in Poland, which was the longest run they had yet attempted in the Eighth Air Force. They flew at 13,000 feet all the way until they could see that the target was overcast and so they climbed to 21,000 feet and bombed Gutow on a pathfinder. On the way in over Denmark they ran into about forty single engine fighters, 190's and 109's, and about ten to fifteen twin-engine fighters. They attacked repeatedly and knocked out several of the Forts, though none were out of the Squadron. At the target they were attacked by some twenty or thirty twin-engine fighters which fired rockets at them. One made a hit at the ship piloted by Smith and he left the formation and flew to the protection of Sweden as did the ship piloted by Lt. Harris. They were the two ships counted out on this raid. The Squadron was in the air for over ten hours on this jaunt.

Along about this time something very strange occurred within the Squadron.

Gunners on the crews suddenly gave up, took their reduction in grade, and left the air crews to become a part of the ground crews, working in the Mess Halls or on the line or wherever they could be best used. They'd come into the Major's office and tell him that they could not go on flying. And the rest became automatic. Not only were these combat failures chalked up to the enlisted men. Officers, Lieutenants, failed too. They came in and talked with the Major and with the Squadron Surgeon and then they were sent before the Flying Evaluation Board and to the Central Medical Board where their alleged psychosis was analyzed. They were grounded. The officer had an advantage in his favor. His commission was not generally revoked. He retained his rank. The enlisted man did not. He lost his. These people walked among the squadron, something new, something not quite understandable—remembering the days of the old crews, when a failure would have been tantamount to quitting in the face

of the enemy. These men walked among us, sad, unfortunate, pathetic in their way, men on whose faces dissatisfaction with themselves was the most marked of all. They were referred to within the unit as "the foreign legion," which was as polite a way as it could be done. There were some of them, I suppose, who really felt that they could not fly any longer. There were some of them who could not face it, physically or mentally. But there were some who just quit. And for these, the whole of the little band was marked and evaluated in the minds of the men. "Combat Crew Failure" was an ugly expression. In some of the instances, it was an ugly, uneasy situation. For no matter what the reason or the background, each was judged alike by the men of the unit and these people did not have the respect nor the admiration. They were the mis-fits. Some of them stayed with the unit in ground jobs. Others went away and were forgotten.

But not all was failure. Sergeant Harold Garic, who had served the Squadron as chief personnel clerk since the beginning, decided that the skyway was for him and got himself made an extra gunner and became a "toggelier," or an enlisted bombardier. Since the new principles of bombing called for the dropping of bombs on the direction of the lead bombardier, the job was not so highly skilled that a man with good sense and reasoning could not handle it, so it had been decided to draft a few enlisted men for the job and Garic moved from the ground personnel to the air crew.

During the month a few more men came back from the continent where they had gone down earlier in the game. Lieutenant Carl Spicer came back and on his heels four enlisted men, Charley Bailey, Thomas Mezynski and Joseph Shandor and William Quinn, the first three being members of original crews. They had gone down on the Regensburg raid in August and had crossed the face of France aided by the the French Underground down to the south, up through the icy passes of the Pyrenees into Spain, from where they were flown back to England. They came back, told their stories—or as much of them as the security would allow—had a few beers at the pubs and went on back to the States.

Someone else came back too, most welcome. Pedro Garza, who had had the GI truck back over his foot during the fall days, came back grinning his toothy grin, taking up his old familiar place keeping the boiler room going and the latrines sparkling clean. Whenever there was a detail to go get coke or something equally unglamorous or laborious Pedro was on it. Now and then he'd get into his Class "A's" and go out at night and play around the countryside, but he was always back cleaning out those latrines at six the next morning. For, as Pedro always put it—"When me drinke, me drinke. When me workee, me workee."

The formation of the 493rd Bomb Group had been going on without a stop. A number of the men of the unit were transferred over to the new cadre, among them Thomas Whitmire, the supply sergeant; Leonard Schlossberg, Joe Vassar, the operations clerk; Walter Pluto, Otto Alley, Joe McElroy, Oscar Legg, David Hey, Duffy Brooks, Donald Campbell, Herman Bankson, Gilbert Sullivan. Along with new papa Lieutenant Richard Nordrum, who hoped to become the Armament Officer. The reactions of these men were mixed. They had in most cases had no choice in the matter of their transfer, the squadron simply getting a demand for so many men and that was that. It had to be someone. Some of them dreaded leaving the old unit that had been their home for so long. Others, dissatisfied and hopeful, saw in the new move a chance for advancement, new faces, change. From the outside other men kept coming to the squadron, being attached until the field for the new Group was ready to receive them.

On the 16th of the month Louis Fallmann, the engineer who had been left behind by the Squadron the previous May in Camp Kilmer Hospital, finally caught up with the Squadron, rejoining to a royal welcome from the engineering department.

And finally, too, in February, two of the remaining handful of original crew men finished up their operational tour of duty. George Rudden, prematurely grey,



full of fun, and curly-headed devilish Charles Sprague made ready now to return to the States with all their awards and ribbons for a rest and a time. Along with them, two of the remaining officers finished too. Lieutenant Moffly and Captain Gospodar, though their plans for returning to the States were less definite. As Rudden and Sprague left for the States that left only two of the whole of the original crews still within the unit. Steve Bosser and Albert Freitas. All the other people were new replacements.

Among the restless contingent who had made plans to go ahead in some manner, Nick Karaglou of the Ordnance department managed to pass the aviation cadet board down in London and finally went back to the States to take his training. Louis Hays and Dick Hawkins, who had filed their applications for the same thing, still waited and sweated out their orders.

The winter was deep and the Russians crawled nearer west and down in Italy things hung static and waited for the rains to stop. The war dragged on and on and looked as if it would drag on forever.

With March came better weather, neither warm nor cold, neither windy nor rainy. Just clouds. Came with it also the repetition of a briefing for Berlin—Big B. And on the third of March the ships finally took off for the German capital.

✓ The air crews had learned to dread the thought of Berlin, for here, if any place, the Germans would put up the core of their resistance. This was Germany's London and, if there were any spot within the Reich that they would fight to defend to the last full ounce of their ingenuity and skill, it would be Berlin. So each time they were briefed for the capital they swallowed hard and steeled themselves. And each time it had been scrubbed and laid aside. All through the winter the RAF had been plowing across the night skies to ladle their bombs down on the city, but they had with them the advantage of the thick cover of night. Even when the weather was bad they had gone out and yet that very bad weather had acted for their advantage in screening their activities, aiding them on their flight. The Americans had prepared and postponed, prepared and postponed over and over for the event that had begun to loom before them. Sooner or later they would come over Berlin and the Germans knew it. And they did. March the third 1944 was the first time that Berliners heard the song of the Forts high above their city and felt for the first time the crashing thunderous attack of their bombs.

The ships had gone off to Berlin through the cloudy morning. Every man on the field left behind knew where they had gone. And as the mighty formation struck into the Reich they swept through the German skies, surrounded on sides and above by hundreds of fighter ships. They were a force to reckon with.

The Germans left them alone. They came on into Germany and suddenly, over the radios, went a call from the English shores to return, the mission was recalled. Now what happened from this point on has been a matter of speculation. Had the leaders heard the call? Did they choose to pretend that they had not heard it? Or did they, in a spirit of defiance, decide that they were going to Berlin this time, call or no call? Some of them turned back towards England—others continued on through the German skies towards Berlin. Of the latter eleven of the ships were those of the 350th Squadron.

The attack was as vicious as they had thought. Up from the ground, from the buildings and the crevices that were the streets of the city came a carpet of flak, rockets and shells, exploding, lacing the skies with jagged sharp bits of metal. Down from the clouds came the swarms of fighters from the Luftwaffe fields. Every known kind of fighter came up over Berlin that noontime to try and stop the Americans. The Americans crossed their fingers, pressed their triggers, giving back everything they got. Suddenly from one of the 350th ships a lucky shot burst forth and caught a fighter squarely. From the guns of Harold Stearns, engineer, the burst streamed and pumped into the German ship. The fighter stood on end in the sky as though taken by surprise and then careened away and fell, bits of the ship trailing off into its wake,

spiraling down into the heart of Berlin. Stearns was the first American gunner to bring down a fighter plane over the heart of the German queen city.

They fought their way over the city and dropped their bombs, then turned and fought their way out. They had losses, but they had broken the jinx of waiting to bomb Berlin. From here on out it was simply another target to be added to the list of German cities eradicated. Berlin was nothing more than another city—another vague spot down below that must be killed. They had done it. They came home to tell their stories to the men on the ground and the people of the press agencies and London papers who thronged on the field to record this epoch of the air.

Once they had added the impregnable city to the list, it was impregnable no longer. The ships went to Berlin on the 4th—and then again on the 6th—and again on the 8th—and on the 9th, as well. And from then on Berlin was to appear with clocklike regularity on the lists.

Oddly enough it was not until the second mission over Berlin that the Squadron sustained a loss. It was Lieutenant Seaton's ship and was the first loss for several weeks.

March went on. Several more of the gunners completed their tours of duty and started back for the States, among them John K. Beard, Charles Mabey, Happy Hodgson, Fay Hulsey and Donald MacAllister.

The third and fourth trips to Berlin proved expensive. Lieutenant Lautenschlager was knocked down out of the formation, as well as Frank Granack's ship, while two gunners, Donald Walker and Raymond Bryan, caught severe flak wounds in their legs, resulting in long hospitalization for the two men.

March went on. General Eisenhower decided that the Americans were going to reflect nothing but good on the streets of London, in particular. He outfitted his Military Police with steel helmets painted white, with white belts and white gloves and white leggings, so that they stood out at night in the blackout. That intrigued the Americans. It no less intrigued the British, who soon began to refer to the MP's as "Ike's Snowballs." The musical comedies and revues in London soon had their respective sketches which embraced dances and cracks by chorines and chorus boys toggled out in the colorful garb. It wasn't all musical comedy for the men, however. They found out that Ike's snowballs had ideas on loitering along the streets, unbuttoned blouses and leaning up against buildings. They found out that being picked up by the Snowballs for one thing or another was often expensive, for they were fined on the spot had their passes cancelled with instructions to return by first train to their unit. Eisenhower was a hard man—but, withal, a fair one and most of the men agreed that the time to crack down was now when the Americans had begun to flow into England like a great occupation force.

Crews went down and crews came in from Stone to replace them. It was a vicious circle, but there was no let up in the pace. The war was hot.

The weather closed in again on the 9th and for almost a week there was little if any activity along the line. Twice the crews were briefed for a target and twice the red flare shot from the control tower just before the ships were ready to leave to tell them that the mission was scrubbed.

On the 19th the ships went out over the English channel to bomb the "No-ball" targets again. This time they ran into flak. One burst came up through a ship and tore through, knocking Edward Walker, a gunner, out of the ship, killing him. The pilot, Delbert Pearson, handled the ship expertly, bringing her back to the English side before crash-landing on another field. Walker, who had been hurled out at high altitude over the Channel, was lost and his body never recovered.

Towards the end of March secret orders came through transferring Robert Brindle, Alexander Dunn, Thomas Zoeller and Coleman Sartoris to Hq Detachment, "5" of the Air Service Command. These men had been chosen to fill a mission of unspecified importance by higher headquarters and so on the morning of the 21st they left bag and baggage for a new adventure.

Lieutenant Caverly, who had headed the Ordnance department since Wendover, left on a similar mission several days later and his place was filled by Lieutenant Ernest Irwin, who came over from the Station Ordnance company to fill the spot. Where Caverly was to go no one knew, least of all himself. These were secret days. People went and came without knowing where and why. Very few asked questions either. It turned out that Caverly wound up in Russia much later on and then we heard he was in Persia.

The weather stayed peculiar. Up and down. Berlin again, and Brunswick, Bordeaux, Chateaudun, Quackenbruck. The missions went on and on. Losses, too. Men like Lieutenant Herbert Devore, who went down with his crew on the 15th over Brunswick.

Dick Hawkins' application for air crew training in the States finally came through and he headed for Stone and a boat home. Louis Hays, on the other hand, after getting himself accepted, suffered a change of mind and had the orders to go home cancelled. There were those that thought Louis ought to have had his head examined. The work on the line was getting him. But he apparently made up his mind. Perhaps he had a good reason.

And so the month passed. Aside from the brilliant achievement of Berlin there was little to distinguish it from the other months that had passed. Or the months that were to come

# X

It was after nine o'clock, Thursday night, the 30th of March, when we finished counting the payroll for the unit. We'd ruffled through the stacks of pound notes and ransacked through the piles of three-penny bits, sixpences, shillings and two shilling pieces and stuffed the whole works into each individual envelope that bore on its face the name and rank of the man and the amount that was due him. The officers had counted it, the enlisted men had checked it, and stuffed it into the rolls. Now we sat back and smoked, while Mike Vespole and Pancho rummaged through the envelopes trying to line them up in the order of the payroll book. It was always a tiring job. Made even more tiresome by the fact that Captain Tienken invariably made a mistake counting his money and that would leave the payroll a shilling or a pound short. We'd have to search through all the completed envelopes to find the error. But what could you say? Tienken was the adjutant.

Louis Hays had just driven the truck down the road, taking the armorers out to the line and Louis Picardi was getting the Ordnance men out. You could hear their trucks racing up in the area. Everything was routine. A half-cloudy, half moonlight night. We posted a gunner on guard over the money and left the Orderly Room to him, to Jake on his CQ job and all went to the barracks to bed. Very quiet night.

Quiet until four forty-five in the morning. Out on the line they had been working all night. And as the mission was to be lead by pathfinders who were to come in from their home field, the men in the tower were waiting for them to approach the field. About four forty-five they heard them. Or what they thought was them. Obliging they switched on the field landing lights to guide them down. What they guided was not a pathfinder. Out in the darkness beyond a lone German raider had sneaked unobserved. When the lights of the field below him lit up so beautifully he must have grinned and felt a very lucky man. He took immediate advantage of the situation. Down he came in one fell swoop. Right over the control tower low and quick. He cut loose his two five hundred pound bombs, which skipped along the runway and blew with a rending crash. Immediately in front of the control tower he tore a huge crater and down along the take-off strip a little further on, the second bomb did as good a job. The men in the control tower paled and shook. The German zoomed up over the trees, fired his guns aimlessly a couple of times, and wheeled and headed back to the coast and home.



The first bomb report woke virtually everyone in the area. The second concussion shook the area. There was nothing but silence outside, punctuated loudly by the voice of the Tannoy system, calling "red alert," "red alert" over and over again though the period for warning was long past now. You could hear the tremor in his voice in the early morning stillness.

The men got up, got dressed, and everybody, officers and enlisted men alike, grabbed shovels and brooms and were hauled out to the runway in the early morning where they set to work and filled in the great craters. The mission was scheduled to take off within the hour and by dawn, Germans or no Germans, it was going out on schedule. So the men swept and shoveled and tamped and in a little while there were no holes in the runway. The ships took off on schedule.

Around the field the stories came in the wake of the bombing

The Armament men had a very convenient ditch that ran alongside their workshop, which they had used as Nature had demanded for some months. It wasn't exactly up to Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval standards for hygiene, correct and pure. Pride was sacrificed for common sense as they jumped into the ditch that morning.

Big, huge, chubby Wayne Ketchum left the communications shack in his shorts and headed for the air raid shelter. He did not come out until he was sure nothing more was coming. Some hours later.

Later the men lined up for pay-call and contributed to the current campaign to buy necessities for Prisoners of War. It snowed. The French announced they thought the Second Front would start on Easter Monday. That is, Vichy said so.

## XI

It was April. Though from the withered appearance of the countryside and its persistent refusal to bring forth greenery and blossoms, you'd never know it. All England might be in bloom, but not East Anglia. Winter sat quiet and triumphant, thumbing its nose at the calendar.

As the month began Zoeller, Brindle, Sartoris and Dunn, who had taken off with such secrecy came back as startlingly. Nothing had happened. They'd gotten to their secret rendezvous, but they weren't wanted. So they came on back to the Squadron.

For some reason rumor began to circulate that the Group was going to move. Some said to the China-Burma-India theatre. Others who had learned that General Kissner had gone to Russia were inclined to view Russia as the probable spot. How it began no one knew. It proved groundless.

Joe Vassar, who had been transferred on paper to the 493rd, decided that he'd rather stay with the Squadron and got himself transferred back with an increase of grade. He was home again. He breathed easier after that.

Private Diego Hernandez, Mexican, took Pancho and Jimmy Rinaldi along with him down to London where he took his oath as a citizen of the United States. The three of them settled down for a nice little stay in London where they cheerfully celebrated.

The planes kept flying their missions. Noticeable was the slow and steady increase of bombing marshalling yards throughout the western section of Germany. There were the rail yards at Rheims and Leipzig and Augsburg on the edge of the Black Forest. There were the trips to Berlin and a couple of "no-ball" targets on the coast of France. There was Friedrichshaven and Dijon and Brunswick and Leculot. And then the weather would scowl at so much activity and close in. The hardstands would have the ships again for another rest.

Near the fifteenth of the month an order came through from Washington which rescinded previous orders relative to sending men back to the States for training. This one caught a lot on the gangplank in England. Not the least of which was Dick Hawkins, who had gotten as far as the Replacement Center at Stone. So he

packed his bag and came back to the Squadron. But, even if he couldn't be a pilot, Dick had made up his mind to fly—to give up his turret job. He became a toggelier and rode the Forts out.

Shortly afterwards Dick was shot down. A shocking, regrettable loss felt by every soldier in the unit.

Lieutenant Irving Juster, the legal mind of S-2, transferred out of the Squadron and the Group to take a better position, and Major Shaw, S-2 head, bellicose individual, moved out of the Group and his place was taken by Marvin S. Bowman, "Red" Bowman, who had labored as the PRO officer and now, at long last, had his chance. He had the fond good wishes of everyone who had ever crossed his path. In his new job he, like Varian, had transferred from the Squadron to the Group, but he left his mark with us, too. Men always referred to Bowman in the possessive. Our Major Bowman.

The whole Group cut quite a caper or two at this time. Major Karl Standish, pompous disciplinarian in the Ground Executive's chair, was sent home from the Group and his successor was a cold-eyed, unfriendly Southerner, Major William Utley. He proceeded from the start on his own point of view. Of all the men whom I knew in the Army Utley was the one man whom I saw deliberately and tragically get off to the wrong start in a new job.

Utley came to the 350th to inspect the area the day after he arrived. There wasn't much he liked. In particular he disliked the pin-up pictures on the walls of the men's living quarters. He made several remarks in very poor taste, remarking that he expected all pin-ups to be removed from the living quarters.

The men didn't understand that. They had tagged Utley from the start. By noon the story of the pin-up had flowed from the Squadron around the entire base. The pin-up was a national tradition. They did not come down. Utley, feeling the blast from the first wave of resentment, did not interfere with them again. He stayed quiet for a day or so.

Colonel Harding, Chick Harding of football fame, had been the Group commander for a long while now and he left and went to Wing and then home on medical treatment. His place was taken by Colonel Robert Kelly. But Kelly was unlucky. He was CO only for a few days and he went down with the ship flown by Captain William Lakin of the Squadron—a ship which took down Joseph Payne, Maurice Cain, Leo Cannon, James Brown, and the rest of them—John Spiker, Delbert Burkhart, Joseph Richards and Albert Freitas. Freitas was one of the two remaining original crew members and this was his 23rd mission. Two more and he would have gone home, his tour completed. Freitas had always been concerned over finishing. Perhaps, he knew he wouldn't.

Things went along. April was one of the busiest flying months for all the rotten weather. The men would hear the BBC news bulletin at nine each night, hear the announcer say—"our bombers were out in very great strength last night." The papers began to show pictures of invasion equipment and men waiting for the word. The streets of London were jammed with soldiers of all descriptions and all nationalities. The word was invasion. The Germans put forth a program to entertain the men in England entitled "Invasion Day" from their stations Calais One and Two, Bremen and Friesland. Lord Haw Haw continued to dangle his words like puppets on a string. Things in Italy were bogged down and the people were weary. Each had his own problem to work out these days.

Planes took off and planes came back. Maybe some of them didn't. New men came in and some old men went out. Now and then ground men would hear a terrible heart-twisting, ripping sound in the sky above as they had on the 20th of April and they'd see a Fort come plunging out of the overcast to bury itself into the ground nearby with a rocking crash, a roar and the silent spiraling columns of smoke as it lay, broken and twisted, flaming and exploding. Perhaps it would be only pieces of

the ship that came down through the overcast. A pirouetting hunk of tail dropping crazily, lazily down from up there; a hunk of torn wing, like a feather, round and round as it came down. Maybe if it were a lucky day, a parachute popping through the low cloud, with a little black speck of a man swinging back and forth on the end of the gathered ropes.

These were not the exceptions. They were the rule. They were a part of the things the men wrote into the sentences of their letters when they wrote "nothing much happened today."

## XII

Maytime in England. When the fields are green and the hedgerows are blooming; when the trees have finally decided to give up holding out and rush into blooms all over the place. When the birds are coming back and the weather warms just a little; when there's a feeling of stirring and living and the hope of the coming months makes you glad you managed to get through the winter, after all. Maytime in England, 1944. A lot of hard, long-houred work and sweat. The getting-ready period when things were going on all over the islands. The Maytime that rail travel got worse and more crowded, long freight lines stretching from one end of England to the other. The May when the stock piles of the arsenal grew in the fields of England and hope grew in the breasts of Englishmen and Americans; in people in all the nooks and crannies of Europe. Maytime, 1944.

Along about March Major Elton had decided that he was going to get himself relieved and return to the States.

Shortly after that he went to the hospital for a thorough observation and checkup. He was found wanting. Aside from a momentary burst of energy and determination to resume his operational flying after Captain Lakin had gone down—Lakin was one of his best friends—Elton remained out of the running. He had received the Purple Heart when a piece of flak came thudding into the pilot's compartment during a mission and he also wore the Air Medal and several clusters to it. He was placed on orders to go home during the first week of May. He was happy. He issued a farewell statement to the Squadron, packed his bags and left for the States—just like that! His place was taken by Jack Swartout, Captain, from the 351st Squadron. Swartout, easy, amiable, and lackadaisical, had only two missions left to complete his tour when he came to the Squadron and his coming was for no other purpose than to wind up the tour. He assumed the command easily, without any ceremony, and, after a few weeks, he packed his bags and followed Elton's trail homeward.

Of the original men who had flown those days in the States and crossed to England with the Squadron only two were left now since the loss of Albert Freitas. There was Steve Bosser, veteran of the Group, who had fallen on bad luck once or twice during the year, and was still flying his missions and Paul Vrabac, tiny, good-humored, who finished his tour and then confounded everyone by volunteering for repeat tour. To replace Captain Lakin as Operations Officer, who had been lost during the latter April days, was Herbert Howard, Southerner, and capable pilot. Howard had been flying with the Squadron for some six months prior to this appointment. His position now was lofty and secure.

As it does in Eastern England, the weather changed abruptly shortly after the first of the month and it was not until the seventh that the planes managed to get off the ground again. On that day they flew deep into the Reich to plaster Berlin again. Berlin was becoming well acquainted with the 350th since that March day when they had first appeared above the Wilhelmstrasse.

On the fifth, two days prior to the mission, Lieutenant Harold Becker had been appointed to the position of Squadron Navigator. On the seventh, when they flew to Berlin, Lieutenant Becker was killed instantly when a 20 mm shell crashed into the ship, piloted by Captain Loren Van Steenis, and exploded directly behind his head. In the blast Lieutenant Lester Torbett was severely injured and as the ships



came back to the field, the ground men assembled below saw the red flares come shooting from the head of the ship, signifying injured aboard. The plane left the formation and came in ahead of the rest. They brought out Becker's body and they lifted Torbett out, loading him into the waiting ambulance to race to Botesdale where the 65th General Hospital was located. The ground men, waiting to get into the plane and make the repairs, watched silently.

Lieutenant Nordrum, who had been transferred out of the Squadron to take up his duties as Armament officer with the 493rd, newly-formed Group, found himself back home again. This made the second or third time that Dick had been shuttled back and forth to other units and a lot of people were calling him "Gypsy," which didn't set too well. But, over all, he was glad to be back again. He moved into the job of Tech Supply Officer, which was the first real assignment he had had within the unit.

Those men who had been assigned to the 493rd Group, attached to the Squadron during the past several months, finally got their orders to leave and went off to Devich, where the new Group was located. Frankly, the Squadron was glad, in one way, to see them go. For their going alleviated a growing housing problem. As the Squadron grew the situation within the barracks got a little congested, and having some twenty-seven men that belonged to someone else living and working within the unit didn't help matters much in this sense!

On the seventh of the month the post of Commanding Officer for the Group was assumed by a Lieutenant Colonel Thomas S. Jeffrey, formerly of the 390th Bomb Group. He was a youngster, actually, only some 25 or 26 years old, and his accession to the post now placed the reins of the control for the Group in the hands of new men all around, other than Captain Varian who still held down the Station Adjutant's job. The Squadrons watched these changes with interest. New brooms swept clean, they remembered. The changes were small in some instances, large in others, not too long in forthcoming.

On the 9th the ships went out in two sections. The first bunch went to Berlin again and the second hit at LaGlacerie, France, a target which was included in the now familiar statement "the Pas de Calais". This was the first time that the ships ever flew two separate missions from the field in one day.

On the 11th they went off to Liege, Belgium, to bomb the factories there and another ship was lost to the unit. Piloted by Lieutenant Gerald Brewer, the ship caught one near the waist windows and a fragment of the shell struck little Jack Smith, formerly a Transportation boy, who had turned gunner along the way. Jack caught a nasty smash in the leg and was hospitalized for some weeks. Brewer managed to bring the ship into the field at Honnington where he successfully crash-landed. It began to look as though the war might be getting a little on the rougher side. At least, Jack thought so.

Captain Swartout had finished another mission and now only had one left to go. Then he would be through. Captain Swartout had no intention of volunteering for another tour of duty in the theatre. Captain S. had only one intention and that was to get back to the States the first chance he had. So into the Squadron picture came Major Maurice Fitzgerald, fresh from the States, a former administrative officer and pilot with one of the Air Forces in the United States. He followed behind the Commanding Officer from morning to night, listening and watching. He began to learn the picture of the unit, what it meant and did and could do under leadership. He read the official diary and the Orders, and anything else he could lay his hand on that would give him the information he desired. He hung avidly around Operations, asking, learning, listening. He wanted to know what was what. If he didn't get the proper slant he'd ask questions of the nearest officer or enlisted man. He asked questions in a probing manner, with authority. He expected an answer, quick and to the point. He started arguments in an effort to break-down

any half-answers he might have gotten. Fitzgerald was marked as the next commander in that parade of Squadron Commanders that the Squadron seemed to be enjoying. Orders came through attaching him to the Squadron. Slowly he edged himself into the circle with caution and reserve.

On the 12th of the month the ships flew to Brux and then the weather came slopping all over again.

On the 13th Captain John Geary, tall, lank, and personable, came in to replace Herbert Howard as Operations Officer. He was another of the transferees from the 390th Bomb Group. On his second tour of duty.

May moved on. In the meantime the big shots at Group Headquarters had been shifting and sidling around in an effort to adjust themselves. With the coming of Colonel Jeffrey, the Ground Executive Major Utley found himself working under a man who gave him license to do the things that he felt should be done on the base. Utley set about to raise up his little kingdom. He tightened up on military discipline and eyed the clothing problem. To attack this he assigned officers from all over the field to walk the streets of the base to gig the men who failed to salute or were wearing the wrong kinds of clothing, mis-mated pieces of uniform. Such as a khaki shirt without a jacket. An OD cap with their fatigues. No hat at all. Etc. Etc. Failure to salute the Ground Executive as he drove past in his jeep meant that Utley would slam on the brakes and back the jeep for a whole block for the privilege of eating the man out. He poked down through the Squadron areas, making a systematic business out of insulting the adjutants and all the enlisted men he could find. He accomplished things! He got drainage ditches dug after the men were through with their long hours on the line, by the simple process of giging the men on the streets for their clothing and their saluting, punishing them by forming his work battalions to do these things. He got things done.

Major Utley was a man whose mind was positive. He was dominant and forceful. It was this same dominance and force that would bring about the things he willed, since there was none who would stand up for the men—since there was none who was in a position to buck his almost supreme authority. He had small hard blue eyes, steady and resolved, and his manner was definite, rude and uncompromising. He brooked no suggestions and gave no quarter. His very appearance became electric to the average enlisted man and there were officers who steered clear of this uncharted Southern reef. His reputation had become glowing and unique in barracks and BOQ. He had achieved notoriety in a remarkably short time. He had arrived!

Outside the walls of the station the rest of the world went on talking about the invasion, and the pilots and their crews flew over the green face of the checkered English countryside and looked down along the coastal rims where the boats had begun to swarm like the gathering of a swarm of bees. Something was coming. The folks back home were apparently getting the business too, along the middle part of this May. For their letters began to show signs of wondering and apprehension, frequently ending with an unexpected and fervent God Bless You that hadn't been spoken before. The men of the Squadron tried to answer these little unveiled sentences, tried to tell them back home that all these preparations made little change in the routine of their daily lives. The people back home refused to believe this. They knew! They had H. V. Kaltenborn, and all the rest, didn't they?

On the 19th the ships struck out at Berlin again. Following the bombing of the specific target, Berlin, on the 19th, the formation was proceeding on its return trip to the home base and had reached a point over the Kiel Bay, when the formation was attacked in a series of thrusts by enemy fighters, attacking from twelve o'clock. In the ensuing enemy passes the gunfire succeeded in knocking out and setting fire to the number two engine, damaging the number one engine of the ship piloted by

Lieutenant Julian P. Rogers of the Squadron. At this point, Lieutenant Rogers switched the fuel cut-off, putting out the fire. The enemy attacks continued and particles of 20 mm shells struck the navigator and the left waist gunner, as well as shooting out the oxygen and interphone systems and ripping large holes in the fuselage and wings. Number one engine was now throwing oil badly and continued to do so for the next fifteen minutes. Lieutenant Rogers felt at this time that the ship could make the rest of the return trip on the two remaining engines and set the ship on the automatic pilot mechanism. However, the ship began to lose altitude and Lieutenant Rogers called the Group leader for fighter support and instructed the enlisted engineer to inform the rest of the crew to throw everything possible overboard to lighten the ship. The radio operator was instructed to obtain a fix on the present location and to inform ground stations of the possibility of a ditching or forced landing in the sea.

The ship, now escorted by four P-38's, continued to lose altitude and the number four engine began to throw oil about a foot high over the cowling. Neither of the props of the two originally damaged engines, numbers one and two, could be feathered due to damaged prop governors, and kept windmilling. With number four engine now gone and the other damaged engines a menace, Lieutenant Rogers knew that it would be only a matter of minutes before the ship would have to be abandoned. At this time the plane was flying at twelve thousand feet and losing approximately seven hundred feet a minute, flying at one hundred and twenty-five miles an hour.

Lieutenant Rogers then told the engineer to tell the crew that they had their choice of bailing out or ditching, and the crew decided to stay with their ship. Full preparations for ditching were completed and upon Rogers' orders the crew were assembled in the radio compartment while Rogers held the ship at three thousand feet and chose a smooth portion of the sea. He then closed the throttle on number three engine and dove, picking up one hundred and forty miles per hour, levelling off at one hundred feet, getting into the landing position at ninety miles per hour. At this speed the tail touched the water and a moment later at approximately eighty-five miles an hour the ship hit the water, the impact tearing up the flooring of the crowded radio room and ripping off the door leading from the radio room to the waist. In the impact, smashing the ship, the tail gunner, left waist gunner, bombardier, and navigator sustained injuries. Water flooded the radio room to a depth of three or four feet before the men inside could get to their feet. The engineer pulled the dinghy release as he rose and the rest of the men fought to free the tail gunner and the left waist gunner through the hatch. By this time Rogers had gotten out and he rushed to the hatch and worked feverishly to free the men. He grabbed the tail gunner and hauled him out, laying him on the right wing and then removed the left waist gunner to the left wing while the others made their way out unaided. Rogers then noticed the dinghy on the left side was only half out and he pulled it out and inflated it, dropping it on the wing. The right waist gunner meanwhile released the right dinghy and placed it on the right wing and the men climbed into each dinghy as the tail and waist section of the ship began to crack. All men paddled desperately with their hands in order to get away from the suction area and the plane sank hurriedly, within forty-five seconds of first striking the water.

The injured tail gunner had been taken into the dinghy with the pilot, Rogers, and the bombardier and immediately after the dinghies had cleared the plane Rogers administered morphine to the injured man. The night passed without incident though the dinghy from the right side of the ship leaked so badly that it was necessary for all the dinghy's passengers to pump continuously to prevent capsizing.

At about four-thirty the following afternoon the two dinghies were spotted



by a flight of B-17's which dropped the Lundholm gear. The ships continued to circle overhead until six-thirty when two Hudsons and four P-51's appeared. One of the Hudsons dropped the airborne lifeboat. The crew immediately got into the lifeboat and Rogers and the engineer got the engines running. The navigator, Mead, put in the rudder and mounted the compass. The other members of the crew read the instructions and placed the injured tail gunner in a comfortable position. They then started off on a course of 240 degrees which the navigator felt was the course to the nearest point in England. One of the Hudsons dropped a message instructing that the course be set to 250 degrees which was believed to be the course to rescue craft. Rogers and two enlisted men serviced the two engines every hour during the ensuing night. The navigator, Mead, and another officer shared the hours of steering, continually watching the compass. In addition, Mead mentally charted his course by aid of the stars as a clock. The rest of the crew manned the pumps. So passed the second night.

Two Hudsons stayed with them and then two Wellingtons stayed with them until around midnight. At six-thirty the next morning the Wellingtons picked up the dinghy lifeboat again and at that time the men in the boat sighted three Danish fighting boats and headed for them. The Danish boats took them on and the crew ate and rested. At ten in the morning an English launch took the crew off the fishing boats while the planes overhead kept their vigil. The launch then took the crew to Great Yarmouth where they arrived about six that evening. The whole crew was entered in the Naval Hospital and then those who were able returned to the base and the Squadron the following day.

### XIII

Actually, the injured were not so badly off as had been feared. The tail gunner had a dislocated shoulder and battered nose. The left waist gunner received body bruises around the chest and had been hit by particles of German shells. The bombardier received a wrenched back. The navigator's left ankle had been injured and he was also struck by 20 mm particles in the head.

The orders relieving Captain Swartout from his command came out on the twenty-fourth of May. That same order placed Major Maurice Fitzgerald in the top spot. That morning the planes went to Berlin again, this time led by a prize crew, consisting of the new Squadron Commander (who had not yet seen the orders placing him in command) and the newly-appointed Operations Officer.

About three-thirty that afternoon the ships came in from the east and brought with them stories of trouble and disaster. What followed was the worst day since that day back in October when so many had gone out and so few had come back. The stories were mixed and garbled and were flak and fighters all over again. The results were solid and lasting.

The leadship had been shot down. Down and out of the Squadron picture went the new commander, Major Fitzgerald and the new Operations Officer, John Geary, and a crew of outstanding men. Three other crews were gone, too. Malooley's crew and Williamson's crew and the almost-finished crew of Lt. Pearson. All good experienced men and well known to the Squadron personnel. They were gone, leaving the Squadron yawning for replacements. The commander spot for the Squadron was yawning, too, after the loss of Major Fitzgerald whom the men had not even known—Squadron CO for less than twenty-four hours! Temporarily, since he was still assigned to the unit, Captain Swartout was the senior officer and nominally the Squadron CO, acting, until a replacement could be made. But the very next morning, on the 25th, there was another Squadron Commander. The fifth for the Squadron—the third in three weeks! This time it was a young and ardent Captain from the 418th Squadron—a man who had completed one tour of duty and was embarking on his second, voluntarily.

On the tenth of October the year previous all the ships had gone out from the Group on that fatal mission and one alone had returned. The youngster who was flying his third mission in three days—the one who came back alone. That man came now to the 350th, experienced and on his second tour of duty. Captain Robert H. Rosenthal, soft-spoken, pleasant, with a set of ideas for closer cooperation between all departments and the furthering of the Squadron spirit. He came at a bad time. He entered a Squadron whose perspective of their Commanders had gotten all muddled up with the frequent changes, and whose morale was taking a beating from the onslaughts of the regime being imposed on them from the bastions of Group Headquarters. But Captain Rosenthal was resolved, too, and he was intent. It was devoutly hoped throughout the Squadron that this might be the man who could bring about the much-needed reform inside the unit as well as preserve the general pattern from the peppering annoyances from the outside. Here was a man who might stage a renaissance of the spirit remembered.

Rosenthal was a sincere, very earnest man. He was friendly, quiet, deep-rooted in his love for flying and his desire to do big things in the air, lucky and sympathetic. He met the men without ostentation, with cooperation, and they warmed to him and began to look with liking and with their first real sign of any kinship since the days of Clevelen. He got along. That was the important thing.

The ships went on their set routine. Brussels, then a day off. Then Strasbourg. This was the one that finished the tour of Captain Van Stennis and he was transferred to Group immediately. He had joined the Squadron as one of the replacements after the black weekend of October, 1943, and his finishing placed the distance between the old and the new. On the 28th of May two boys, Edward Daly and Hobart Trigg, came back to the field after having been missing in action for over six months. They could not tell of their experiences other than to say they had been in France, and, from the snatches of their conversation, they had a rough six months, living and waiting for the opportunity to come out of the occupied zone.

The marshalling yards were priority in bombing towards the end of May. Magdeburg and then to Leipzig again. Decoration Day came in sunny and warm. The weather for the whole of the week-end was hot and sunny and there was an ease of summertime laziness over all. It was a period in which even the withered sparseness of the Norfolk countryside looked pleasing. It was an important week-end to the English—Whitsuntide. They crowded onto the already packed trains and went about their three-day holiday. But the men on the post worked on and thanked a bountiful heaven for a few days of home-like weather. That morning the ships went to Troyes and the next day to Osnabruck again. They had missed the target the first time—they didn't miss it the second time.

From the pattern of their assignments and those that dove-tailed with the RAF's night time activities it was apparent that SHAEF was now concentrating the driving power against the whole of the rail and communications lines of Western Germany, the Lowlands, and France. The Germans were not without their plans, too. Red alerts became popular night sports again and the defense unit put in more hours of alerting and practice. The Division headquarters hinted darkly that they might be put to a more real use in the days to come, and their words did not fall upon entirely deaf ears. The radio announced that the Fifth Army in Italy had been regrouped and was gathering their strength for a new assault up the coast. In fact, the latter days of May that very assault had started again and up from the coast of Cassino they came.

Tension was growing, no doubt of it. Group insisted that the men carry their carbines and their revolvers to breakfast and to dinner and on to their duties. Gas masks became popular after ten in the evening and the press howled over England

for invasion and Second Front. The month of May had come in like a lamb. It went out like a lion.

#### XIV

June began very well as far as the weather went. But it suddenly crumbled. The skies filled with heavy, low-hanging clouds that occasionally spilled out with cold, irritable spasmodic rain. The morning of the second of June the ships went off after one of those "secret" targets in France and then came back, reloaded and went off for a second time that day, hitting near Paris. The weather changed again, sealing them on the ground on the third, lifting to allow them off on the fourth. On the night of the third the whisper of a coming restriction went the rounds and, while it caused a flurry on the part of the men who had immediate passes coming up, it never came about. Not on the third, that is.

The fourth they whacked at Boulogne through weather that seemed uncertain whether to cloud up solid or clear up. They flew. Still no restriction came on. The men going on pass during the day did so with their fingers crossed. There was a tang of expectation in the air.

On the fifth the ships went out again, this time to the home of Goering's yellow-nosed fighter groups at Abbeville, and it was early afternoon before they touched home soil again. It was a slow dullish afternoon. The war seemed awfully long and drawn out from the barracks and huts of the cow pasture in Norfolk. At five in the afternoon the war picked up.

By ten minutes after five all passes, leaves and furloughs were cancelled, an extra guard was posted on all points of the field, all ships and crews were alerted. There was certainly something cooking! Instructions were issued to the Defense teams, to the First Aid and Chemical teams as well, to be especially alert, to sleep with their clothes on. Night came. Everyone was brittle and tense, keyed-up all over the field.

There was little sleep that night. The linesmen worked most of the night. All the allied departments were called on to work as well. The ships took off at twenty-five minutes past three in the inky black of the night. They circled around and found their formation and then headed down across the Channel to that part of France nearest the Cherbourg peninsula. Down in the Channel below them so many thousands of feet, stretching across the water from England, was a great carpet of ships, big, little, medium, old, new, formidable and intent. The bombs from the bays of the Squadron's ships spilled out over the rim of France, gouging out great holes in the shore defenses so that the taut men riding in the little ships below might gain their first footholds on the battered sands of the beachhead. The men left behind on the field knew something was happening but they weren't sure. This was top secret stuff and, while they guessed, they went to bed not sure.

The mission came back at 10:25. But before they had returned, a second section had taken off at 7:45, and followed the original mission over the Channel. At eight in the morning a few men on the base heard the British Broadcasting Company's eight o'clock newscaster when he spoke—

"The German Overseas News Agency announced at seven this morning that Allied Troops are engaged in landings on the beaches of Northern France." That was all. No one heard anything else. The nine o'clock news didn't add anything more. Suddenly the BBC broke into their musical program. It was 9:32 in the morning, June 6, 1944. An announcer calling the people of Norway, Denmark, France, the Lowlands, to stand by for instructions from the Supreme Allied Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower. His voice, rich, American, homey. The Invasion Communique Number one. He read it twice. The Invasion, the Second Front, hoped for, wanted, dreamed of, planned for—was here! What had begun this morning was the beginning of a long, long road. But it was the beginning! That was what counted. All the wondering and waiting were over.



The planes went out again at five-fifteen that afternoon. At eleven-fifteen, in the rapidly-falling dusk, the planes came back, feeling their way over the fields of England. The ground men, with their gas masks and their carbines by their side, watched them circle the field just under the overcast which had become thicker with the failing day, watched them circle cautiously, their thoughts on the ever-present threat of possible enemy aircraft following them back home. Still, on this D-Day, they all got down safe and sound. No incident occurred. All hands still slept in their clothes. Somehow, no one trusted Jerry—not quite.

The night passed and with the coming of the next day the news was good, reassuring all around. The Mess Halls, the Line, the barracks all chattered with renewed vigor and higher morale. There was a good feeling despite the heavy and increased burden of work that everyone was doing. Because of the simple fact that they felt they were on the way now, home was closer—just with the start of D-Day.

D-Day brought other things, too. Jim Fitch, who had been injured in Kearney when a packing case had fallen on him, gave up in the small hours of the morning and was borne off to the Station Hospital suffering from fatigue. He was on an inactive status for sometime after that. But, as he said, he had built things up and from here on out it was up to Eisenhower!

On the seventh they received orders to fly to Nantes, on the other side of the Cherbourg peninsula, where a particular bridge was proving a headache to the landing forces. The ships went out over the Invasion area and placed their bombs squarely on the center of the bridge. They had been told: either destroy it or don't come back! So they blew it up! They returned at eight in the evening in broad daylight. The day was warmer and an outlook for improvement in the general weather conditions seemed good. By nightfall, however, the weather failed.

It must be remembered that everyone was pretty tense in these few days during the beginning of the invasion. We carried our carbines wherever we went and the place bristled like an armed camp—which it was. On the night of the seventh it was very quiet. Darkness was just beginning to crowd the day. Suddenly down out of the overcast a lone JU-88 came zooming to tear across the field at tree-top level. This was the signal for nervous action all over the field. All the stationary guns had been manned. The men had been given instructions not to fire unless absolutely necessary—for fear that their fire would betray the location of the field. Tonight the gunners were too nervous. They heard the strafing guns of the lone German and they cut loose with a demonstration of tracer bullets that looked like the Fourth of July. The air was full of whistling, zinging shots.

Into the bomb shelters the men tore. When these were filled they jumped into the ditches, under trucks, alongside buildings. Anywhere. I was never sure whether we were hiding from the bullets of the German or the wild aims of our own gunners. But we were definitely taking cover! They got it out of their system. A lone B-24 returning late from a mission chose this unfortunate moment to cross the field flying at moderate height. He was fired upon repeatedly and landed some minutes later at his own field, his ship perforated, his nerves shaking. The gunners around the field felt themselves very heroic that night. We weren't so sure in our sanctuaries of holes and crevices around the field. Roy Byers, a 350th gunners, was the only casualty on the field . . . and all he had was a slight creasing on the forehead caused by the ricochet of a bullet.

On the eighth the ships went to Tours and came back okeh. The news from the beachhead this D-Day plus two was good and gain. Substantiation and progress. The weather almost broke through and backed into a pea-soup drizzle. Everyone still went to bed with his clothes on. The next morning the weather was wet and windy and heavy, news was skimpy, and a feeling of restlessness, uneasiness swept

over the field. The day dragged along unmercifully. We were so close to the big things that were happening. Yet we might as well have been thousands of miles away.

The ships didn't get off the ground for three days which left the landing forces without much of an air cover. Then they flew to Berck-sur-Mer. Arthur Pinuti, an engineer, was transferred to the 95th Group where his knowledge of German and his mechanical ability were in demand. Secret stuff. He went gladly.

The planes got out on the morning of the 12th to the coast of France but the momentary break in the weather sealed itself and it grew as rotten as before. The news from the beachhead was a little better, a little more encouraging.

In spite of the weather the ships got off the ground on the 14th and again on the 15th, flying once to France and once into Germany. But they were not the only flying things in the air over Britain that 14th of June.

During the early evening hours of the 14th around 11:30, a cloudy obscured night, the Germans turned loose some strange projectiles across the Channel towards London and the area known as Southern England. Odd, fantastic, pilotless aircraft of some sort that came with increasing frequency and devastating effect. But no definite news came through—just rumors, indefinite and worrisome. The Germans remained silent. The British remained silent. Until Herbert Morrison, the British Home Secretary, rose in the House of Commons on the morning of 15th to announce that the Germans had begun to use a form of pilotless aircraft against England. Then the Germans went to work on their radio. Dr. Goebbels took over on Calais 1, 2, Bremen and Friesland. He worked intently and steadily. He claimed that the new secret weapon was working havoc on London, leaving it in the old familiar ruin of rubble and fire. The English press and radio clamped down on information, ruling that the term Southern England might mean anywhere between the Wash, north of the base, to the tip of Land's End far to the south of Wales. But the pilotless plane did, as the Germans claimed, steal the number one spot in the news of the day. And as the days passed, it was evident that, instead of a mere flash in the pan, the pilotless aircraft—flying bomb—or “doodlebug”, as the Americans named it—was definitely a thing to cope with. The men on the base, restricted throughout the invasion period from any form of rail travel, read and listened to the stories of the new weapon with interest and curiosity. They wanted to see for themselves.

On the 17th First Sergeant Kirn, along with Glenn Myers, escorted Canadian-born Amos Hill to Chester where they witnessed Hill's naturalization as an American citizen. Coming back they took the chance to have a day or two in London. This was the week-end, that first week-end, when a flying bomb sailed into London and crashed down on a Sunday morning service at the Guard's Chapel at Westminster, killing eighty or ninety people at worship. The German radio continued to sing a triumphant song.

On the 18th the weather was a little better and the planes went off again, to Brunsbuttekoog in Germany; the news from the beachhead grew better and the news of the pilotless plane grew worse. They were hitting London and demolishing when they hit. Their range was apparently limited, for the damage was in the London area alone—and the portion of the country known as “bomb alley” running from London east to the coast, towards the Calais area from which the things were being fired.

The planes continued to fly in spite of the particularly bad weather that showed no appreciable sign of changing. It had been terrible ever since D-Day. This was D-Day plus 13. On the 20th they flew again and on the 21st, as well. On the latter date they filled up their tanks and their bomb bays and took off on what was perhaps their most ambitious flight since the days of Regensburg. This

time their course was marked for Berlin and then, instead of turning and coming on back, they continued in full flight to Russian airbases, the establishment of which had only recently been announced. At the Russian bases they refueled, repaired the minor damages, and then flew out across Hungary into Italy where at Foggia they managed a couple of operational missions before continuing the three-way shuttle back to their home bases in Britain. They left on the 21st but were not back in Britain for some days later, until after the first of July.

While they were gone changes came about. First, the twenty-five mile area to which the men had been restricted as far as rail travel was concerned was lifted and each man was allowed a 48-hour pass, which was taken in London for the most part. Those London days allowed each man to see for himself the extent of damage and effect of the flying bomb. Some of them enjoyed their experience, and others did not. Some stayed their passes throughout the forty-eight hours, and others did not. Some of them returned to the comparative silence of the country to finish out their pass. But all of them knew after those days what was meant when people mentioned the "flying bomb".

### XV

The first day I went to London after the restriction lifted was on the 23rd of June. I got off the train prepared for action. Out to a friend's flat where I kept grouching that I hadn't seen a flying bomb. I would, they said. About ten-thirty from the other side of the city the sirens began to wail and, as we sat there, you could hear them rising and falling eerily until the whole city was locked in the breath-taking sound of the alert. You'll see one now, they said. I grew tense as the sirens died away. There didn't seem to be a whisper in the whole of the city. It was early evening and the sun was just setting over behind Hammersmith. Suddenly you could hear the bomb coming. You knew it was the bomb even if you hadn't heard one before. The noise was incredible and undefinable. Sounded like nothing I have ever heard. One of the boys said later that it sounded like a motor with a heavy load. I know it had a definitely dirty sound—the color I thought of was muddy brown. It was a dirty, brownish sound. The thing came skating across the evening sky, very low and very fast. Like a toy plane, wings and all, and an odd, tube-like structure on the tail end, emitting a sort of flame as it went. It came low over the houses, until the noise of its engine seemed to shake everything, setting your teeth on edge. It passed on. Over Hammersmith the engine stopped. A sudden sharp explosion rocked the house. And from somewhere near the Hammersmith Palais de Dance a towering mushrooming cloud of smoke and dust silently pushed up into the late afternoon.

As they come, the engine supplies the propulsion that makes it move. When it gets ready to pounce, the motor stops, cuts out, and the bomb drops on the building below. So that when you hear it coming, listening to it come, you hear it steady and ugly. Then suddenly there is a silence. Maybe five or ten full seconds. Then the blast. Those seconds are the loudest silent periods I have ever known. Everything stops. It seems as though there were no sound in the world at that moment. A momentary pause while you wait to see where the thing is going to hit. And when it does hit and the sound of the blast comes to you with its concussion, you have a nice warm feeling of relief. Someone else caught that one. Not you.

After dark you can't see them, of course. All you get is the unearthly sound and then the break and the boom. Before the motor stops, of course, if you are outside on the streets you can see the tail and it looks as though a comet were on the way across the city sky. I saw one that looked more like a red ball sailing harmlessly through the air.

The bombs don't bother you so much, surprisingly. It does get you, though, seeing all those little kids and their parents huddled down in the subways all over again. For while there have been people who have been down there all the time,



sleeping on the three tiered bunks in every subway station or sprawled over the concrete of the station platform with their blankets and their pillows, any sudden spurt of activity drives a lot more of them down into the comparative safety of the tube and there they bed down for the night in the most uncomfortable positions you can imagine. Somehow it seemed as though it were the very young and the very old who were down there—more than the average ages. But I suppose everyone was there, really. You stepped over them and around them, threading your way to a late train.

That was what we were fighting for. Existence. To end all this sort of thing. So that people might live without being pestered and bedeviled and forced into these unnatural ways of life. That was why Americans were there in England. Or passing through. So that our people back home could live without ever even knowing these touches of fear and frustration that come to some in the face of such things as these.

With no planes on the field (all remaining aircraft which had not gone on the Russian mission had been sent to other fields from which they operated during the ten days that the field remained non-operational) it had been decided to repair the runways and the perimeter which had become a little rocky and rolling during the past year of use. That was not the only construction evident. With their gains from the failures in the clothing and military courtesy campaigns, the Group sent out labor battalions to lay a road to the Officers' Club and in general to beauty up the field and engage in constructional orgies.

Those ten days were a breather, none the less, for the ground personnel. It was in effect a rest, and the first one that they had had since they had started the long days and nights of work the previous June. Those ten days did much to restore the morale of the men. Mostly, the pass and the let up in the working routine did that. The news became increasingly better, too, in the latter days of June. The troops on the beaches had gotten a toe-hold by now and Cherbourg was nearly ours. The Russian armies began to stir and move forward slowly.

Rumor had blossomed forth again. The rumors of going home. Home in thirty—sixty—ninety days. Rosy dreams of home began to grow. B-29's had hit Japan and the war looked good for no longer than a "few more days". There had been a B-29 brought over to the ETO the previous winter, secreted in a hangar not far from the station. The men had taken turns going over to the other field and giving it the once over. It did not fly over the English skies and most of the men never saw a B-29 so long as they remained in Britain. The news of their operation against the Japanese hyped the interest around the field. Actually, the Pacific wars never seemed very close to us, there in the midst of all the blood and thunder of the German scene. The names Halsey, Nimitz and MacArthur seemed remote and impersonal. We were Eisenhower men. We know far better the names of Patton, Bradley, Spaatz and Doolittle. That was only natural, I suppose.

## XVI

July was a hard work month all around. In flying and on the ground the call was for increased effort and there was no lack of things to apply it to during the days that were to come. The weather for the most part continued very poor until nearly the end of the month, when, shortly before the first of August, it began to look as though summer might make a somewhat belated, but thoroughly British appearance. The Americans moved towards Cherbourg and finally took the port and then swung towards St. Lo and the edge of the Brittany peninsula. The air force was called on to support these troops in their drives and during the month the Squadron planes made many missions of a tactical rather than the usual strategic importance, bombing troops and supply lines behind the enemy front lines.

Routine matters prevailed until the fifth of the month when the aircraft came back from their shuttle mission to Russia. They came back bringing stories with

them. They told of Russian aid and of the big-bosomed Russian girls who worked in the kitchen tents on the sandy strips of the landing fields. Of the blitzed villages and the scorched earth. Captain Chadwick's crew had at first been reported shot down out of Berlin en route to Russia but later turned out to be simply victims of a mechanical failure, had stayed behind in Russia for a few days, returned to England via the scenic ATC route.

Along about the same time that the ships came in from their international junket, Glen Keirse, who had been shot down in Italy during the flight to Africa during the Regensburg raid in 1943, made his way back to England with the liberation of that portion of Italy where he had been held prisoner. He came up from London to visit with his old friends on the ground crew before going on back to the States. Glen was received with much enthusiasm. He told little of his adventures, but from what he hinted, they were something! He left for the States with a pocketful of back pay and the good wishes of everyone who ever knew him.

On the seventh of July the Squadron flew on their one hundred and fifty-sixth operational mission, taking their bombs to Gottlingen, Germany, without mishap. The next day they went over Germany to the northeastern corner of France where a little spot called LeLentie housed an airfield. They criss-crossed the field with their bombs and eliminated it from the Luftwaffe's charts.

Time was passing and the men were working. Captain Howard, who had been replaced as Operations Officer by Captain Stapleton, in turn replaced Stapleton who went from the organization. The following day the ships went to Munich through an accurate field of flak that nicked the ships up pretty well.

On the twelfth Captain Donald J. Blazer, the original Engineering Officer, was transferred out of the Squadron to the 452nd Bomb Group where he had a chance to become the Group Engineering Officer. It was a heavy loss to the Squadron, for Blazer was one of the men who had been originally assigned in Idaho in 1942. He had put forth much and gained much from the men of the line. But it meant advancement for the little officer and he deserved it. The men were for him in that respect. He was replaced by Captain William Cook whose place as Tech Supply Officer had been taken over by Lieutenant Nordrum. The next day the ships went off to Munich for the second day running and this time they were not so lucky. One crew, piloted by Lieutenant Ronald A. Waters, was missing. On the crew was a happy-go-lucky youngster, a Lieutenant, Alfred M. Shearer, who had seen service in the Pacific theatre and whose father was a Colonel with the signal corps in London. Although the news came through much later on in the war—when members of the crew finally returned to the Squadron—it was learned that they had been struck by flak and had failing engines so were left with no alternative than to strike out for the Swiss border nearby and crash-land there. While they were stationed there young Shearer was killed in an accident. All the other members of the crew eventually returned safely.

The war in France grew a little more intense. On the seventeenth the ships flew out over the battle lines in France to destroy a bridge and mess up a marshalling yard south of Paris. On this mission Lieutenant Fayette was seriously wounded while all the rest got safely back to the field in time to see their comrades taking off on the second mission of the day. They went to the ever-present target—the secret German installations along the coast of France.

Captain Rosenthal, the new Commander, attained his Majority on the eighteenth and on that same day, in the early hours of the morning, Roy Webb of the Engineers had a nasty accident that resulted in a near-fatality on the ground line. Working on one of the ships in the darkness Webb stumbled into a whirling propeller and was instantly cut down. The flat side of the prop struck him in the shoulder and chest, inflicting grave injuries. He was rushed to the hospital and found to have sustained broken collar bones

as well as serious internal injuries. He needed blood immediately and an appeal was made to the men in the unit to supply it. They responded willingly—all but one man—and he was given several transfusions. It was to be a long time before he was well. He was never to come back to the Squadron, going on home to the States for his final recuperation.

The work and the targets went on. Schweinfurt, Merseberg, Ludwigshaven, St. Lo—to help the ground troops out—Merseberg again and again, and Munich—the July record piled up.

On the twenty-eighth they flew over Germany to Merseberg. Out over the old familiar North Sea disaster struck from within their own ranks instead of by German hand this time. Lieutenant Stansbury's ship and the one piloted by Lieutenant Spear came together, one settling down on top of the other in the formation. Both ships cracked and went plummeting out of the formation into the cold waters below. Both the ships and their crews were lost, except for one lone man, Sergeant Robbie Gill, a gunner, who was miraculously able to escape from the wreckage. With severe bruises and cuts, one of which left a vivid scar from his left temple to his chin, Gill managed to free himself and, with the aid of wreckage, he floated around in the sea alone for several hours before the Air-Sea Rescue service came to his aid to return him to the English shore. He was all right within the week and back with the Squadron. But it was a shattering experience. There had been six officers and eleven enlisted men lost on that tragic error.

The month closed with the Munich mission of the 31st. The planes encountered little opposition and damage was confined to the ships and not the personnel. On the day before, the Squadron had received more replacements in the air strength, some fourteen officers and twenty-four enlisted men. Once again the figure of strength within the unit began to edge toward the high mark. Fingers were crossed that it would remain that way and allow us to achieve the maximum strength for once. But somehow it was almost too much to even wish—for every time the strength approached the maximum mark, something would happen to cut it down to low figures all over again. Maybe this time would be different. There were stirrings of a definite nature in Normandy. The Allied move was beginning to edge over into Brittany. Flying bombs became a little more intensified over London and men came back each time from pass with some hair raising tale of their effectiveness. The war slid into August and the papers and the radio kept hinting that big things were on the way.

## XVII

In the closing days of July the forces of the British and American armies which had since D-Day been engaged in establishing themselves thoroughly on the Normandy peninsula and building up their vast supplies and manpower finally got going on their moves. The British held the pivot line at Caen and the Americans swung around to the south and began to spill out of the cornucopia into the Brittany plain across the sprawling lap of the mainland of France. They moved fast and they apparently moved according to plan. When the Americans had spilled across England, moving into British lives, the British had a saying that cropped up continually. The Americans were "over-bearing, over-sexed and over paid" while the Americans tartly commented that their British buddies were "under-paid, under-sexed and under Eisenhower." When the move finally came out of the Normandy backlog, the British were assigned to hold the line, while the Americans in all glory swept across France. The Americans took to remarking caustically that it was apparent, in the words of the BBC, that Monty was poised again! Somehow it seemed as if Monty were always poised! After the sweeps were done and the whole picture was apparent, it was possible to see the value of the work that the British troops had done at Caen. Holding the Germans firmly so that the American



flanks could get away and in deeper all the time. But for the months that started with D-Day—Monty did seem to do a heck of a lot of poisoning!

With the start of the offensive the ships were called into action, running a support for the ground troops, bombing just ahead of their advance. They left in the afternoon of the second on one of these missions, coming back safely in the early evening. Again on the next day they went out on one of these tactical missions. This time they hit at bridges behind the retreating enemy. The following day the weather came down in thick hunks and they stayed on the ground.

And so the work of the war went steadily on. A huge batch of replacements arrived. Some twenty officers and thirty enlisted men. These replaced not only the crews who had been lost in the missions but also those who finished their missions and returned to the States. It was not like the days of 1943. Nowadays crews came in and they flew day after day and before you had had a chance to get thoroughly familiar with them they had wound up their twenty-five or thirty missions and were checking out to return home. It was possible now for a man to finish his missions inside of two or three months.

And so the month of August went forward. The new crews trained and became operational. The strength of the air echelon was high now. They flew a number of missions over France in the tactical sense, supporting the troops slashing their way towards Paris. Now and then they flew their original purpose mission, a strategic mission against rail yards or war industries in Germany. The whole was part and parcel of the gigantic plan to knock Germany out of the war.

Towards the middle of August First Sergeant Karl Kirn who had been under medical treatment for some time was relieved from his assignment and sent to the 65th General Hospital. This came as a surprise to most of the men in the ground strength since they had not been aware that the fiery First had been ailing for some time. And the minute that the news of his release spread around the conjectures went up on who would fall heir to his job. There were those that said that someone from the outside—outside the Squadron would get it—and others who thought they knew someone inside the unit who would get it. Major Rosenthal and Captain Tienken had it decided already.

Pat Chandler, now working as the Squadron personnel NCO at Group S-1, a careful worker, had been in charge of the Squadron Defense Team was reasonably popular with the general run of men. So the Major and the Captain called Pat in and gave him the job.

Chandler was not exactly the Kirn type. Where Kirn was loud, erratic, approximating the picture that most people have of Army First Sergeants, Chandler was quiet, diplomatic and easy-going. Where Kirn relied on command and dominance in the fulfilling of his orders, Chandler relied on cooperation and a diplomatic inter-play to bring about his desired results. When Kirn openly rebuffed the officers—most of them—and showed his manner in sarcasm and in rudeness—Chandler was highly diplomatic. He favored them and did their bidding. This was the kind of man that they liked, someone they would back up and give their support to. So Chandler was in. He took over and the Squadron accepted him because they had known him for a long time.

With Kirn's leaving the unit the Squadron was without any particularly fiery personality. When the Squadron had been formed and was training throughout the States Kirn and Harry McMillion, the original line chief, had been the two men in the unit who had extensive experience in the Army—the old line Army men. They had ruled their respective worlds coldly, giving no quarter. They had few real friends. They made no attempt to bridge the gap. They were ruthless, somewhat alike—and the men respected them, fearing them, leaving them strictly alone. So the two autocrats had things their own way for a long, long time. They were excellent men for their particular jobs. McMillion moulded and created the line—no matter how much the men who disliked him

so might belittle his efforts. He did make the line. After he left to return to the States in the months of the first winter, the line went under the leadership of Albert Strain. The same situation existed in the First Sergeant's position. Kirn had moulded the office staff below him during the training period—taught most of them what they knew, formed most of the plans and the fundamental rulings. He had been ruthless and hard most of the time and there were a great many men who did not like him. But he had most of the men's respect and their grudging admiration. He was a hard taskmaster, a man who got results. He left this Squadron that he had formed and brought to maturity to the lesser experience of Chandler.

It was a working month, a month of changes. The weather for the most part was rainy and none too good for flying. But General Patton and his men plowed across the face of France while the British, poising no longer, struck out from Caen to the north in an attempt to eliminate the flying bomb sites and General Patch's men came booming up from the coasts of Southern France. It was a month of conquer and liberation, the month of the liberation of Paris and Brussels, the month that brought the land forces to the gates of Germany and the air power to its highest peak of efficiency yet. The men began to pay more attention to what was going on in the Pacific and to wonder about the future. August was finished.

#### XVIII

September was to be a month of events. Not in the passing of a year had the Squadron felt the absolute pinch of the war as they were to feel it during this month. The pinch came up on them suddenly.

The men were going out on their furloughs again. The second round. Some of them to London to play and rest among the flying bombardment. The bulk of them up to Scotland to the peace and tranquility of the Scottish countryside. But regardless of choice they went when they had the chance!

On the first of the month Lee Cropp who was allegedly over-age—but if so, then a young-old-man—went home to the States, to Mrs. Cropp and the good sunshine of California. Lee was missed, for he had tremendous drive, good spirit, one of those men who act as a spark plug for the men around him. But he wanted to go home very badly and he went. The men were glad for him and sorry for themselves, which is as high a tribute as anyone can earn.

On the second the ships flew to LeFere, France, on a tactical mission and on the third the ships took off during the afternoon to cross the Channel to bomb the stubborn hold-out garrison at Brest. They had not even gotten to the target before tragedy tapped them. Lieutenant Goethal—John D. Goethal—his little-boy face very sober as he told his experiences—related what had happened when he returned to the field—some days later.

Something mechanical had gone wrong with the ship while the formation was crossing the Channel and, before much time had elapsed, the pilot, John David, had called to the crew, warning them that they would have to jump for it. The ship plunged and only three of them managed to clear—Goethal, and two enlisted men, Henry Hendrickson and the little Chinese-American gunner, Carl Fong.

"I don't know exactly what happened," Goethal said later. "We got out of the ship somehow and I was falling end over end. I pulled at the rip cord on the chute but it wouldn't work. Then I tore open the flaps with my hands and the chute finally came out. I wasn't very high off the water then. All three of us fell into the Channel about the same place though as the time went on we drifted farther and farther apart. We didn't have any dinghy and so it was up to us to keep afloat as best we could. I don't know whether any of the others, aside from us three, got out or not. I don't think they did. We couldn't see anyone else." He stared at the floor for a moment. "The other two had their Mae Wests okeh. They worked and held them up. My Mae West, like my parachute, was no good. So I paddled around and tried to keep my head out of the waves. I figured this was it."

While the three of them were floating around in the water a British destroyer came alongside and scooped first one up and then the other. Goethal still paddled. Finally, an hour and a half after they had hit the water, the ship spotted Goethal as well and took him aboard. The three men were stripped of their clothing, wrapped in blankets and given something hot to drink. They were set ashore at Portsmouth, given British clothing to wear and came back to the field—on the train.

"Funny thing," Goethal smiled. "All the time I was floating around in the water I thought of my girl's face. I just kept on concentrating on her and finally the ship came up and got me."

Hamburg, Magdeburg, Berlin and Northern France followed on the target list. They flew through clear weather, cloud-banked skies and dull, slate skies to get at their marks. And on the tenth day they went out after a prime number, Nuremberg. The ships came back safely. But the Squadron lost a man, nevertheless. Major Rosenthal, the CO, had piloted another ship from another Squadron, using the crew of that Squadron and he failed to return. At first he was chalked up as missing. His luck had run out on his tour—the second one—when he had some fifty missions chalked up against his name. You could run a good thing into the ground, it seemed!

Reports filed by the returning crews were a little unstable. As they tallied the belief became stronger that he had not gone down over enemy territory but had crashed en route home over captured territory. The reports showed that he had been trying to make our side of the lines before he went down. They were right. He had.

Rosenthal had been returning from the target with severe damage on the ship and he knew that he could never make it back to the base. He headed into Northern France, figuring that he could crash-land somewhere behind our lines and thus escape capture by the enemy. He flew along picking out a field that looked reasonable and brought her down. The ship overshot the mark, clipped some trees, and crashed solidly and firmly. Rosenthal and the rest of the crew were severely injured. After being shunted from hospital to hospital he finally wound up in the big general hospital at Oxford—where he stayed to recuperate from his injuries. A broken nose, broken elbow and severe cuts and bruises. Including one deep gash on the head which necessitated his hair being shaved off, adding wounded pride to the rest of the damages. It meant that he could not fly for some time. That meant that he would not return to the Squadron. The men felt sad about this. Rosey, in the time he had been with the unit, had become very well liked. He was modest, unassuming and sympathetic. He would be missed.

The day after Rosenthal's loss the ships went out in very great strength to hit at Ruhland. The Germans hit back hard and telling. The Squadron lost every single one of its ships and their crews over the target. Of the thirty-seven officers who had taken off that morning only one returned to tell about it. He, Charlie Gunter, flew with a crew in a pathfinder ship. And he it was who told the story, the old familiar story of an onslaught of enemy fighter planes that ripped and tore the formation apart and wiped out the 350th all over again.

Once again the pall of heavy disappointment hung over the ground crews. Just when everything seemed to be going along so well! Now a line of empty vacant dispersals testified to the fact that the Luftwaffe still had a number of good kicks left in it. Men sat around the barracks with nothing to do until more planes came in—remembering other days like this.

This time there were still left some who could fly. And fly they did. To Madgeburg and to Stuttgart. New crews came in and the fight went right on. They didn't tell Rosey down in Oxford that his Squadron was all gone. They figured it would upset him. But when they went down to see him, flying down in the old "E," he read it right out of their eyes. They finished his afternoon by telling him that they thought—they said it gently—that he ought to go home—to give up. But Rosey was adamant. He



## ***They Never Had It So Good . . . .***

knew he'd lose the Squadron. But he was coming back to the Group. He would fly again. They shrugged their shoulders. You couldn't beat him.

More crews came in on the fifteenth. Then Captain Tienken's monotonous orientation lecture on which he spent an hour each time telling them all the rules and regulations of the life in the ETO. The weather dipped into the poor for several days and everyone got a breather.

In the meantime across Europe in Poland, in the heart of Warsaw, the partisans had staged a revolt—in the hope that their efforts would be aided by the Russians not so very far away. As the fight thickened they called for help, food and ammunition. On the morning of the eighteenth the ships went off, carrying in their bomb bays supplies for the beleaguered garrison. It was a gesture destined to come too late. It took them across the breadth of Germany, Poland, to the American fields in Russia and brought them a degree of honor. Colonel Thomas Jeffrey, the field Commander and Captain Austin Dunlap of the Squadron both were presented with awards from the Polish government in recognition of their service. In addition to the regular crews which flew on the mission to Russia there were three men, ground men, who made their first mission on this trip. William Jackson, the communications chief, John Riffle and Albert Strain of the engineering department. The ships refueled, reloaded, and flew from Russia down across the spread of Roumania dropping their bombs, as they went, on Szolnek—the two hundredth operational mission of the Group—an important rail center in the path of the advancing Russians, and then continued on to their base in Italy. Thence back to England. They came back tired—and impressed—on the 22nd of September.

In the meantime, to replace Major Rosenthal as Squadron Commander, the Group sent down Major Maurice F. Youngs, quiet, pre-occupied, twenty-eight year old combat man, who had flown with the 390th Bomb Group. He came to the Squadron and assumed command—the Squadron's sixth commander in fourteen months—and the fourth in five months. They had begun to come and go.

The ships ploughed on, this time attacking Ludwigshaven in their prosecution of the war and the following day they were over Bremen. On the twenty-seventh they ranged over the Rhine to pound at Mainz. And while they were hitting along the Main River that day Flight Officer Hubert Trent, one of the original crew members who had gone down in the fall of 1943, came back. He, too, had a story of secrecy and escape which took him undercover across the veiled face of France and Germany into the sanctuary of Switzerland.

Men came in and went home. Mostly the air men. Because the ground men, well, they were mainly just stuck.

Not all were stuck though. Jim Griffith, who had long worked for the Squadron and then for the Post Exchange, where he had been Lieutenant Paul's right-hand man, got his chance to go home. He was shipped out at the end of September under an over-age ruling. He went on his way blithely to rejoin his wife in Ohio. Griff was very well liked by everyone in the command. He had a ready sense of dry humor and wit and his presence was the signal for a lot of fun. He had not gotten the best of deals—somehow there never seemed to be a place for him early in the inception of the unit and by the time that he had found his true niche in the Post Exchange it was too late to reward him with the rating. But he had done an excellent job and he was a friend of everyone. Lots of us hated to see him go, for when men like Griff went, a little bit of the Squadron had chipped off and was lost.

### **XIX**

As the month drew to its close the Group decided that it was a good time to celebrate the completion of two hundred operational missions—which had in fact been completed with the dropping of bombs on Szolnek, Hungary, on the nineteenth of the month. But the celebration was held over until the ships returned from the Russian junket and all the personnel would be present.

For the party it had been decided to declare the whole Group non-operational for the two-day period—the thirtieth of September through the first of October. It didn't quite work out that way. Division or someone double-crossed us. They flew a mission on the thirtieth to Bielefeld, Germany. But that left the first and they didn't fly then. In fact, they had returned from Bielefeld before the party really got under-way. They griped a lot about the treachery of people, though. They had counted on NO missions for the two days.

On Saturday afternoon there was a field day with competitive events—in which the 350th placed third—held out on the perimeter in the fields by the big hangar. After this came the barbecue, cooked and served by the kitchen personnel in the open pits constructed on the field. Free beer and ice cream, too. And real American hot dogs! Off to the rear of the big hangar they had brought in a complete English traveling carnival, with its swings and concessions. The men flocked in, spent their money and had a good time. That night the busses brought the women—farmer girls, girls from London, the men's special girl friends, WRENS from Great Yarmouth, ATS, WACS, all manner and description. A big dance was held in the gaily-decorated hangar. During the evening there was an "alert" but very few men or women knew it. Among the guests on the field was General Jimmy Doolittle himself, very democratically holding forth, hatless, to the men clustered about him, asking questions, kidding around. He spoke to the assembled men and their ladies preceding the dance, congratulating them on their achievements and their success. The old oil. But from him it sounded good.

The following morning breakfast was held in the Mess Hall for the men and their feminine guests. And the day closed with a tea dance for all comers and their dates.

So the month ended. While outside in the world in the place called Arnhem the war spawned in the warmth of an error and grew a little stronger again, stretching out towards a winter and the spring to follow. The wicks of the lamp of war were trimmed with the keen razor of disappointment during Arnhem week.

As the month of October began—October which sort of belonged to us—remembering the October of the year before—it was well to look around, take stock of us and see what had taken place.

The field had grown and expanded since the year before. Not in actual size or outlay. It was the same that way. But the Post Exchange had moved from the old building and now stood where the Old NAAFI building once stood. And the beer hall was no longer simply a pile of barrels and a scaffolding for a counter, outside. It was a room of its own, with a metal bar and the proper tools for dispensing. The old officer's club had been closed, repainted and reworked, and now in its place there was the movie theatre—with a real screen and good sound equipment and fairly late pictures. And the other half of the building had been remodeled and turned into the Big Top Club where the enlisted men from buck sergeants on down had their own bar and their own parties—at a cost. Over behind the combat mess they had taken an empty building and built it into another club, the Sergeants' Club—where Master, Tech and Staff Sergeants had their bar and their club rooms—where monthly dances were held for the members and their guests. The officers club had been remodeled too with a fancy bar and equally fancy rooms for dancing and relaxation. S-2 was no longer up on the hill by communications but down adjacent to Group Headquarters and Group Operations. The Operations Offices of the various Squadrons had long since been moved from the areas and were up by the communications block on the hill alongside the perimeter where they were near the planes and the scenes of their activity.

The Squadron area was continually under a state of construction from the time we got to England until long after the war had ended. About this time in October, 1944, they were concerned with stealing a larger boiler from an unused building and installing it in the wash room so that the men would have more hot water for their

shaving and bathing. They carried out the maneuver very well. A group of the engineers went up to the abandoned building in the dead of night, unhitched the boiler and trundled it down on the trailer to the wash room and the switch was completed. Then Major Utley—always alert for malfunctions—heard about it. Down he came in his car and probed around the boiler room. But it was locked and, strangely enough, no one could find Pedro. Pedro had the key! So the Major went away strongly suspicious but not confirmed. He found out later and demanded that the boiler be taken out of the wash room and replaced in the original location. He didn't demand it. He ordered it.

Everyone appealed to everyone else on up the ladder and finally the Colonel heard about it. Somehow the whole thing was straightened out to everyone's satisfaction. Except, perhaps, Utley. The boiler remained with the 350th. That was that.

The housing situation had grown acute. So to relieve the congestion a tent was erected and Retz, the carpenter, laid a concrete base and then built wooden sides on it and then put the tent over all. It worked out nice. Six men to a tent. So a string of six were erected and the engineering department plus a few other people moved into them.

The men had met girls. Life progresses. Some of them put in their application to marry. They settled down off the base with their wives—when they could get off the base. Franklin Stifter married a girl down in the little village nearby and Herb Lake married an Irish colleen he had met. And Gerald Young married and became a father of one. While George Thomas married and became the father of two. Warren Nelson got married one Saturday morning down in London at a church near Elephant and Castle and Eddie Kotwica got married to a London girl along about the same time as Frank Stifter had married. In fact, the Squadron went to the party in the recreation hall down in Brockdish. Everyone had a whale of a time.

They got married and had their own lives in the midst of all this community living. It was funny how little you actually knew of a man even though for years he slept and lived beside you. The men came and went on passes. Frank Stifter and Elwood Frum always going out together. Oscar Gorbet always out on pass in the evenings. And Herb getting all decked out to go see his wife who had moved to Scole to be near him.

Time passed through the summer, down through the second fall in England. Down in London the buzz bombs stepped up and came thudding, crashing down all over London. They sailed over Kensington and tore great holes and gaps in the face of the suburbs. They thundered down into Aldwych to kill and maim. They came in increasing numbers—two and three hundred a night along through September until it seemed they would never stop. The British back room boys scratched their heads, worried, wondering what to do. Combat planes chased the bombs in from the coast, exploding some in the air, even tilting the wing with their wing to send them crashing to the ground. Finally the British devised a system that might stop them. They took all their available anti-aircraft and placed a thick ring of them along the coast. They took all the barrage balloons out of London and built up a ring of them behind the guns. Then another ring of guns behind these. And the fighter fields behind these. Behind all of this was the target, London.

They battled to save their city. In that city the people, and the men of the Squadron on pass, went on about their businesses and their pleasures on the streets. They'd come up out of the tube, their eyes automatically seeking out the alert card that hung somewhere in the station. If it was red and the "alert" stood out printed against the red background, they took note and went out into the street, knowing. If it was green—and the words "all clear"—they went out, knowing, too. All day long, all the night as well, the sirens would come, rising and falling all over the city in that eerie sort of way that after a while made you a little sick at your stomach. After a little while the all clear would sound. That gorgeous, lovely still one-note that would sing and vibrate



all over the town. You'd go to a movie. Three or four times during the feature there would come superimposed over the picture the word "alert" and then, before the hero could have done too much, the "raiders passed" or "all clear" would be there. At play, too. The little box down by the footlights or up on the wall. "Alert" or "all clear." And that struggling with the rest of the audience to watch the actors and listen to the lines when you could hear the coming bomb outside. Awful silences, the crash. Then you could go on looking at the play and listening a little easier.

And just when the flying bomb seemed to be whipped—they lessened in their intensity towards October—when the armies of the British swung northwards and overran the bulk of the firing sites in the Pas de Calais—then the "gas mains" started exploding. The first one went off in August. During September a couple of more of them. People referred to them as "gas mains." But they knew—and we knew—that something more was added. Something else as devilish as the flying bomb had begun to come from the Fortress Europe. This time it was rockets. The big heavy, rocket that arced over from Holland and Belgium and came rushing down from seventy miles, so fast that you had no warning, no defense—and all you had was the blood-red smear against the sky and then some thirty seconds later the awful, crashing reverberating thunder of its explosion, racing and rolling over the roofs of London. A sudden crash that lifted you in startled surprise as you walked along the streets. An explosion that woke you from a deep sleep. An instrument of incredible destruction that laid waste to entire blocks. With no defense possible other than to get the war won and over with. This was October 1944. The week of Arnhem had just past.

## XX

The first that we knew of Arnhem was the long floats of gliders that went over the field on their way to Holland that morning. It had begun very early, around four in the morning, and continued all the day. Halifaxes and Sterlings and Lancasters towing a glider behind, the box-like looking craft riding just an edge higher than the parent plane. They roared up from the south and in from the west and headed past us out towards the coast and the North Sea and Holland that lay beyond.

The Arnhem gamble failed. The Germans rushed reinforcements to the spot and the British were trapped without reinforcements. They were decimated and the few that got out managed to escape only by the skin of their teeth. The men of Arnhem were with us. The gloom was high when the word of the failure of the plan went around. This meant that the war would drag on. Arnhem was an expensive gamble. It had not succeeded.

October for the Squadron began auspiciously when the ships flew to bomb an objective near Herford on the first day, all of them returning safely. On the second Kassel caught it again while on the ground things moved in a routine fashion. Members of the crew commanded by Arthur Harris who had been interned in Sweden since the early part of the year began to file back to the Squadron through London and returned to duty. They came back sleek, told tales of bountiful living amidst the neutral goodness of the northern country.

The following day the ships went to Nurnberg again. This time they ran spang into the well-known flak curtain. A large jagged fragment struck Howard Dralle in the legs which so injured them that an amputation was necessary following his return to the field.

Dralle, a very likeable kid, was popular and this sudden tragedy shocked every member of the Squadron. An appeal went out again for blood. The response was immediate and eager. He was given innumerable transfusions and his life was saved.

On the fifth the ships bombed Munster where almost a year to the day most of the original crews of the squadron had gone down—but this time the war was older and the luck was better. All came back safely.

Again the next day they went to Big B—Berlin—and this time as always Berlin struck back. One crew missing and one gunner injured by flak. The war was still on, the men of the ground thought as they watched the ships come back with jagged holes in their fuselage and the single red flare spiraling out of the ship with the wounded aboard.

Leipzig the next day—one more crew missing. For a time it had been thought that this crew landed in Holland but hope was false and they finally wrote “missing in action” after Lieutenant Albert Grigg’s name and those of his crew.

And so the month spun by. Mainz, Bremen, Cologne, Kassel, Ludwigshafen, Munster again, Hanover—supporting the troops still—the list was familiar. The damage was familiar and the wounds were old news. The war was getting routine in the fields of Norfolk. The Germans came over now and then with planes but not much. A “red alert” now and then—the sounds of distant anti-aircraft, a bomb or two, the pheasants cackling in the woods, then stillness. Later the all clear. Routine.

Major Rosenthal came back from the hospital and then went to Group where he was given a new job to do. Major Youngs came to the end of the line and got himself ready to go back to the States for a rest.

In his place the Squadron received as their seventh Commanding Officer, Major David K. Lyster, Jr., on direct orders of Colonel Jeffrey. The Squadron looked Major Lyster over.

We’d had quite a collection of Commanding Officers in our day. There had been Clevon, the hero. Then Elton, the unique, different type. Then came Swartout, diffident and not too interested. Fitzgerald, who served for a day and then—missing. Rosenthal, sober, eager, a flyer. Conscientious. Youngs, silent, unobtrusive, preoccupied. And now Lyster.

Lyster was the Colonel Blimp of the Squadron rogue’s gallery. He was a man of late twenties—though he looked much older. He was impeccably neat, pompous and austere. He had a good mind and his conduct as a Commanding Officer was dignified. At first he was not particularly sociable. He maintained a definite line between the ranks and the grades. A Major to Major Lyster was a Major. A Captain a Captain. Sergeants were sergeants and so on. He depended wholly on those around him for every thing. Someone licked his stamps for him. Someone prepared his packages. Someone saw to it that his jeep was fixed and ready for him. Someone watched over his stove in his quarters to see that the oil was all right. Someone did something personal for Lyster every hour of the day. When he came into the room, he expected the deference that his rank and his position demanded. Not imperiously — he simply expected! He had a number of foibles. He carried a stick, in the manner of British officers. This was hard for the men to take. His upper lip was adorned in a great, old-fashioned horse moustache which, as it grew, was waxed on each end. This caused the men to catch their breaths. He not only expected to fly missions and discipline the air crews as was his duty—but he would also aid and direct the administration of the ground crews, something that most of the CO’s did not bother with unless a case were specifically brought to their attention. Major Lyster came to his new command fresh from the States with a whole set of pre-conceived ideas of how things were going to be run. That was nice. The Squadron had seen such things before. The odds were even that he would be broken into the Squadron pattern within a month.

Towards the end of the month the assignment of new crews had reached a peak. In the straining barracks some twenty-three crews lived and worked. Twenty-three crews. The original strength had been nine.

The weather slid down and stayed solid the rest of the month. October went out quietly and November came in and winter with it.

## XXI

Comparing the fall of 1944 to the previous fall by English standards the former was by far the colder and more disagreeable. As November began the signs were up for a very cold and bitter season. The British press didn't help matters any. They had begun to hint that the Isles and the Continent were in for the coldest weather in some fifty years! It was bad enough to contemplate from the flat dullness of Norfolk. What it must have been on the bitter Western Front or the Southern or Eastern—was beyond comprehension.

Since Hitler had by now virtually lost all of the original flying bomb sites in the Pas de Calais and Belgium he had dreamed up a new way to get rid of the surplus bombs on hand. Through November and December and on into the New Year he lashed them on the backs of Heinkel and Dornier bombers. They came in from the North Sea along the edges of Norfolk and Suffolk and turned them loose so that they roared down along at the tree top level across the fields and villages south to London. It was an extremely hap-hazard sort of way for the Fuehrer to carry out his warfare. He had, in more halcyon days, been neater, more original about things. These cast-away bombs came skitting along over the trees, wobbling and wavering and crashing all over the countryside, now and then getting into the London area.

The furloughs which had started again in August continued. The field had a quota for the number of men to be spared from the base at one time in order not to cripple the work of the line departments and it took about four months to run through the entire roll of the Squadron so that each man had his week to ten days.

On the second of the month the ships went off to the old familiar target of Merseberg and they ran smack into a well placed wall of flak. One burst came spinning into the tail of Lieutenant Glenn Rojohn's ship, instantly killing the tail gunner, Patrick F. Fitzsimmons but the ship was able to return from the mission otherwise okeh. Fitzsimmons, small, plucky and a nice boy, was taken from the ship and later buried at the American cemetery at Cambridge—a great green expanse where so many of the men who had died in air crashes or on the missions were laid to rest.

On the fourth they went to Freiburg and on the fifth they were riding high over the streets of Berlin again.

The weather closed in on the sixth for several days. On the seventh, however, it lifted long enough to give the higher-ups some ideas about running the eternal practice mission. So they gathered all the crews together and sent them off into the afternoon. The mission got off the ground and cruised along off the eastern coast when, suddenly, without warning, something happened to the ship piloted by John J. Dyatt. Witnesses in other planes saw the whole interior of the big ship a seething sea of fire and the ship lost altitude immediately and went plummeting to the earth. It came down on the edge of a small British seacoast town, tearing and roaring into a British service barracks, killing several. Dyatt, along with a passenger from Group Headquarters, and a gunner, Donald A. Gustavson, were instantly killed, having failed to escape the stricken ship. The other men flying in the plane, Ralph C. Bohlssen, Preston Wallace, and the enlisted men, Nelson B. McLain, Cornelius Romano and August Kienitz, managed to get out and parachute to safety, though the two officers suffered severe burns about the body and face necessitating a month's hospitalization.

Squadron Operations had by this time fallen into the hands of Captain Henry Smith who had taken over during the fall when the previous officer in charge had been relieved. This constant changing of men in charge was a hardship on J. C. Hale, the Non-Comm in charge, but he had no choice and went on about his business, putting up with the foibles of some men and getting along famously with others. His staff, Roger Hoffman, Roger Sortevik, Leonard Dombroski and Joseph Adams worked the missions in a routine manner now, for the bulk of them had been doing the job straight through since the beginning. Roger Hoffman in particular doing an excellent



job. Roger was a heavy-set pleasant boy and he took particular pride and joy in his work. He bossed the air crews, officers and enlisted men alike, made them get up in the morning, get dressed, shepherded them to the briefings, met them when they came back, made them toe the line. There had been only one change in the Operations line-up in some time. Joe Vassar who had been the second clerk in charge had been switched from there to work for a time with Mike Vespole in Station S-1 and then he had finally gone over to work with Station Equipment where he was in charge of the highly contested issuing of the dress jackets for the enlisted men.

On the ninth the ships went out to aid the Patton armies, hitting at the rail yards at Saarbrücken, and the following day they went to Giessen.

Armistice Day came again—unheralded. It passed. Next day the ships went out uneventfully to Darmstadt. The weather sat down heavily on the eastern portion of England. The twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth—the ships were held. The troops along the front had broken out all along the line, slogging through a sea of mud and went towards the Saar and the Ruhr and, when the planes finally got out again on the sixteenth, they went to help the ground forces, splattering the enemy position just ahead of the advances.

Prevailing bad weather again. Four more days of inactivity. On the morning of the 21st they took off for Germany again. This time it was Osnabrück but the weather, while it had cleared a little along the English front, was thick, impenetrable, over the target. They brought their load back to the home base.

They went back to Osnabrück the next day, carrying out the mission as planned. No casualties.

Bad weather all over again. This time it really closed in. Rain poured down steadily, filling the creeks, the static pools and the gutters. All of the hollows in the fields became miniature lakes. The ships sat untidily at the dispersals, dripping away the days. It was not until the 26th that the Group got off on business again. This time they ladled out their destruction on the vital, much-battered railway marshalling yards at Hamm. The weather held them two days more. Then they went out to Hamm again.

On the 30th at 0915, a cold, slate-grey morning, the ships went down the runway, off into the overcast heading for Merseberg again. Merseberg was a tabu for the Squadron. Losses were invariably high over this priority target. One Lieutenant walked into the equipment room muttering "Merseberg! Merseberg!" to himself and was promptly court-martialed for revealing the target before the mission. It was an expensive error to let the mind wander, even in a whisper.

The Merseberg flak field was still in operation. Extremely accurate firing took its toll. One ship piloted by Stanton Lawrence was forced down en route home at Brussels, now in Allied hands; while a burst of flak, striking another ship in the nose, came crashing through the thin walls to catch young William Kilpatrick in the left arm, fracturing it in several places, tearing the flesh very badly. He was later removed from flying status and, when he came out of the hospital, he joined forces with the Operations staff.

The month of November came to a close. The Germans fought savagely as they yielded their ground inch by inch. What was to have been "Victory by Christmas" looked a little distant now. It would be Victory—the handwriting was on the wall for the German Reich to read. But it would be hard won, bitterly-contested. The prospects of an early day shriveled, as remote as the flat, drab countryside of East Anglia as the black December came edging on.

## XXII

On the second the ships went off at 0900 heading for Coblenz. But their trip was in vain and they came back to the field, bringing their bombs back with them like Mary's little lamb. Days like this, especially in the winter, were the hardest for the ground

crews. You refueled the ships and loaded them and got them ready to go off and then they came back and the ships had to be unloaded and the whole business repeated. But it was in the cards and sometimes they lost—and sometimes they won.

The weather on the third held them in again but on the morning of the fourth they got their objective. Freiburg—down in Southern Germany, rail center, and important to the defending Germans for the transmission of their supplies. Then the weather came down and for a week there was nothing but rain and no flying activities. The morning of the eleventh they went off to Coblenz again. This time they were not as lucky as before. Three officers and six enlisted men failed to return, downed in the vicinity of the front lines, so close that not one knew whether they had been on this side—or that. It looked as if Lieutenant Ethan Porter and his crew had “had it.”

On the twelfth the crews went to Germany again. The next day the “doomed crew” of Lieutenant Porter, so mysteriously missing in action, suddenly reared up and returned to duty. It seemed, according to their story, that they had landed near Brussels, due to mechanical trouble, and with a little adjustment (and almost forty-eight hours in Brussels) they came on home. Odd, so many crews had been forced down in or near the Belgian city recently!

On the middle of the month Captain Smith stepped out of Operations and his place was taken by Captain John Gibbons.

In the meantime the Squadron's ground men went on plugging away. There wasn't much of a change in their life or their routine. What they were doing now was much the same as it had been when they had first started their work in June, 1943, some eighteen months ago. For the most part they were still living in the same barracks, still doing the same things day after day. They got their shots about once every six months when Johnny Zinkine and his staff would arrive in the early morning and set up the shot dispensary in the aisles of Barracks 7. They caught their colds and some of them battled it out with sulfa and the new penicillin. Some of them went to the sick quarters for a rest or over to the 65th General Hospital for treatment. The majority just went on.

Coal or, rather, coke rationing had begun again. The men went to the little coke hut each day to get their two buckets a night. Lawrence Worley would dish it out leniently—and Jimmy Rinaldi would not. The cooks went on working—getting up at four in the morning and striking out in the cold to the kitchens. Day on, day off. The Ordnance men played cards, went to the movies, or slept during the days, worked most of the nights. And the Armorers. Some played volleyball in the center of the area when the weather permitted. Bill Shaw had gone to work in the Engineering office. All the others—the medics and the clerks and the men who worked in the PX and in the Squadron offices—men like Hank Clayburn, Harold Beckett, and that genial hulk, Al Parchman, who trained the “links” and bossed the flying officers around. Each had his job to do. They went about their business. They listened to “Command Performance” and “Mail Call” over the American Forces Network and, sometimes, though not very often, they listened to the BBC to hear the “Variety Band Box.” Most of them listened every night to the nine o'clock news, the only official news of the day. But most preferred the AFN to the Forces Programme or the Home Service. They read the English papers but they preferred the Stars and Stripes and Yank; laughed at Mauldin but liked Breger and Wingert a little better. Maybe, because they hadn't met many Willies and Joes.

The ships didn't fly again until the 18th when the weather kindly allowed them to get up through the clinging fog. On the 16th Field Marshal von Runstedt, perceiving a loop-hole in the widely-strung American positions along the German border, struck savagely with concentrated force. He spilled his divisions through the gap in the line. It looked as if he were on his way back to Antwerp! This was the “Ardenne Bulge!” The formations took to the skies through the still-present fog to strike at Mainz and the

vital German rail links feeding replacements to the advancing Germans. The 19th passed—stand down. No mission. The 20th passed—stand down. The blue light in the little box at the top of the telephone pole kept shining in the night. No mission tomorrow. The 21st—the 22nd—the 23rd. The grey-German horde flowed on through the Ardennes and the feelers reached out for Liege and the river Meuse. The Americans tried desperately to stop them but they were swamped, overwhelmed. On the 24th, Christmas Eve, the Germans stood at Celles, not more than a stone's throw from the Meuse.

The ships got off the ground that day. Christmas Eve. They flew to bomb the German airfield from whence the air support for the German operation was stemming. They got good results. Though the trip cost them two wounded, Flight Officer Marvin Berg and Private Francis Finn, both of whom caught some of the enemy's retaliation.

That night, that second Christmas Eve, the men of the station, air and ground alike, went to church in the chapel and prayed and a good many of them were praying for the coming year and the peace and home. And later, as before, the Tannoy system carried the sounds of the old familiar carols across the fields looked down upon by a moon that looked down on Celles where the fighting was bitter. The tide of the German advance had bogged down in the face of bitter American resistance. The Germans were halted.

On Christmas day they worked, too. The air crews went off on Christmas day, striking at the rail yards at Kaiserlautern. All came back safely, though a crew, piloted by Leo Ross, was forced down en route back in Belgium.

Christmas morning dawned and with it came the hoarfrost. Thick, heavy frost gilded the trees, the hedges, the buildings, every solid thing with an inch or so of white, icy lacing. When the morning sun broke through to turn the whole into a pink and then fiery blaze of red, the field looked like a Christmas fairyland.

Christmas day brought a special treat to the men, too. The USO-Camp Shows brought a full-length play to the station on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Noel Coward's "Blithe Spirit," starring in the flesh none other than the original New York star, Peggy Wood, ably supported by Claire Luce and Doreen Lang.

New Year's Eve came and the end of a long, hard, endless year. The ships celebrated the day by hitting at Hamburg and this time they were not too lucky. The escorting fighters, receiving a call of distress from another Group, went off to rescue them, leaving the formation unprotected. This was the moment the Luftwaffe had been waiting for. They poured down through cloud-openings. In several passes the Germans took their toll. 18 officers and 27 enlisted men went down with their ships in the heaviest loss the Squadron had sustained in many months. New crews, old crews, they all went down. The old year ended on a sombre note. This was the war that was going to be over by Christmas. But they hadn't said—which Christmas!

### XXIII

Major Lyster went on being Commanding Officer. He had a lengthy term of office by this time. His pomposity had cooled down somewhat and most of the men seemed to like him. His handle-bar moustache had now reached exquisite proportions and the ends measured seven and a half inches from tip to tip—waxed. They had gotten used to his leather covered sticks, too. His jeep, personally nursed by his aide, the First Sergeant, Pat Chandler, became a thing of paramount wonder. It had sides, windows, doors and Major Lyster's name sprawled across the front of it for all to see and know.

The weather was beastly. Cold, damp and frosty ever since that beautiful Christmas morning. During the nights, when the cold frosty fingers came poking up through the divisions in the biscuits, down in between the blankets, when the coke ran out and there was no more until next Thursday, the men began to burn anything they could find, even the cardboard rings that came from the bombs—this was winter!



On the second the ships went out to Kreutznach. The next day they went to Fulda. The American-British attempts to squeeze von Runstedt's troops back into the Reich following the break-through of December was slowly gaining ground. Success was coming. Slow, tortuous work. The men paid more attention to the radios, watching their maps, learning the names of places—like St. Vith and Bastogne—learning their importance, watching the slow advance of the once-routed Yanks. With them in spirit, in heart were these men sitting in their so-called luxury on the flats of East Anglia.

The weather balked again on the fourth with snow added to the general hazards of keeping the planes in the air. Men worked in icy conditions, slipping and sliding on the aircraft wings, working on frigid hardstands, whipped and lashed by the Norfolk winds. Men slipped and bounced and tumbled around on the ice, sore and bruised, swore and cursed Nature and England and Hitler and the war in general, and went on with what they had to do.

In spite of Nature and the weather the ships went off on the morning of the fifth to Frankfort and its marshalling yards. The formation returned without Fred Parrish or his crew. They had been forced to bail out of their ship close to the German lines and scattered on landing. The ship continued on its way, flying on the automatic pilot to finally crash some one hundred and fifty miles from the point where the crew had abandoned it. In the days that were to come all of them returned to the base, though plumpy Walter Cummings and John Ledley were hospitalized, with Cummings going home and Ledley remaining in a French hospital for an extended time.

The next day they went off to bomb the yards at Annweiler and all returned, though John Stachowiak suffered a painful but not serious flak wound.

They went to Cologne, the battered cathedral city, the following day. On the eighth and ninth the snow came down in good heavy swirls. The Snow and Ice Detail got frequent summons to the Sub-Depot hangar. Those not on the detail moaned and cried about it all and then someone would say something about the men in the foxholes not so far away. Not far enough away to overlook. They held their silence.

On the morning of the tenth the ships went up in darkness at eight o'clock. It was an overcast morning and the skies hummed with the throb of their engines and the ground was carpeted in deep white snow. It was quiet down below. The Engineers and the Ordnance men and all the rest who had gone to bed in the morning after their night's work was done slept heavily.

Suddenly—at precisely ten forty-three—there was a grinding, splitting sound. As though the floorboards of heaven were being torn up. Men all over the station paused, arrested, to listen. They'd heard that sound before. There was a whistling, descending scream. Then the crump of the crash as the ship bore into the ground. From the area in back of Station Sick Quarters a thick pillar of smoke mushroomed black and solid.

Someone found a helmet over in the field across the road. Others said they had seen three—four—six parachutes come down. No one was sure. Someone staring at the rising column of smoke figured the ship had hit in the bomb dump. Everyone stared. No—it was too far left. Or right.

A terrific explosion settled all arguments. With it came the staccato rat-tat of machine gun bullets. Another solid, earth-shaking explosion. It *was* the bomb dump! The ship had plummeted right into the center of the area where all the bombs were stored. The whole countryside knew it within a few moments. Great clouds of black, spiraling smoke twisted into the murky sky, punctuated with phosphorus and steel. The incendiaries were going off. Men headed for the bomb shelters this time. They headed from the base, striking off across the fields and the roads, tramping through the heavy snow. Anywhere, get off the base before the big ones went off!

They filed across the fields, black against the snow, accompanied by the civilians whose homes were on the field. The rabbits struck off across the fields as well—fleeing from the inferno of sound and fury that had been the bomb dump.

They got all the men out of Sick Quarters. Forty-five minutes later the smoke and the explosions died away. It looked as though it might be over. But Headquarters warned that it was not. The bombs were in revetments—each type of bomb buried in its own field. The fire was edging from the phosphorus incendiaries towards the other compartments. At one fifteen it started again. The air around the field sang with far-flung bits of metal fragments. The camp rocked under the force of the explosions. Headquarters became concerned. The fire was heading for the 2000 pounders. If they went, so would the entire base. They issued hurried instructions for everyone to clear out, get off the base—anywhere. They told the units on the field to draw the thick blackout curtains, open the windows to lessen the shock of concussion. The field settled down to wait for the big ones to go.

At three o'clock the fires were out. The blackouts blinds were opened. The ships came in from the mission to listen for once to the blood and thunder of a ground man's story.

As the story came out it appeared that there was only the one ship involved. The pilot lost control and the ship went into a spin. The crew miraculously escaped by parachute; no one was injured. When the fire department had driven up to the bomb dump to see if they could put out the fire, they quickly and wisely washed their hands of the affair and got out of the vicinity. But the big bombs had not gone off. The score for the disaster was no one killed, no one injured. Damage was fairly light considering the implications. The rabbits, the cats and dogs and the humans filed back into the base. Life went on where it had left off.

The next two days the ships stayed home. The progress of the Anglo-American recovery on the Runstedt salient was coming along ever stronger through appalling conditions of snow and ice. Suddenly the silent Russians came to life with a bang. They struck out angrily, desperately, and flooded in a steady wave across the plains of Poland into Germany itself.

On the 13th the ships visited Mainz with their greeting cards again. The 14th they filed into the interrogation room with their reports on the bombing of Berben. The weather went sour on the fifteenth and again the sixteenth. But on the 17th they went off on their way to Hamburg where they reported with jubilation an excellent strike. But the off-again-on-again weather went off again. It was not until the morning of the 20th that they got to hit at the same old marshalling yards at Heilbrunn.

When von Runstedt broke through in December he was stopped at Celles. True. But the break-through had been expensive in men and machinery. Machinery could be replaced. Men could not. The ground forces issued a call for men from the air force. Headquarters for the Air Force issued their calls for quota broken into divisions. Divisions broke them into Groups and the Groups broke them down for the Squadrons. We got our first quota. Two men to go to the infantry.

It seemed a little harsh, somehow. For the men had been overseas for a long time now, going on two years. And then take them and toss them into the infantry to be replacements seemed a little harsh. They made it harder, too. You couldn't send a line man. Engineers or Communications or Ordnance, Armament. No trained man. Just clerks—somehow clerks always fell into the overage category! Clerks were considered untrained. Clerks were available. Men who worked in the kitchens and in the odds and ends departments around the field. These men were available for the infantry. They had to be replaced sometime in the future by men who had been injured in the fighting and were being reassigned to the Air Force ground crews. It got so when the word went around on the grapevine that there were to be more quotas for the infantry there would be a hushed, worried silence among the men. This was something new, something serious to reckon with. They read of the new appointment of General Ben Lear in charge of all this and connected the two items. The greeting became not "what's cookin'" but rather "what do you hear from Lear?"

Two people the Squadron liked got something along about this time. First Glenn Myers, crew chief, was awarded the first of the Bronze Star Medals for exceptionally meritorious service above and beyond the line of duty. He got it for his ship "Hard Luck" which had run up an amazing total of combat flying hours on the original engines and superchargers that had brought her to England.

During the first 41 missions, at which time Myers was commended, Hard Luck had dropped a total of 192,810 pounds of bombs on targets in Germany and enemy occupied territory. During that time the tireless ground crew groomed her with a fanaticism that rose as the total flying hours mounted.

Myers' assistant, Pete Sokolsky, was an experienced man, as well as the remainder of the crew, Amos Hill, and Leonard Muszynski. All four of them put in long hours above and beyond the call of their duties to keep her going. These were the men who kept the four original engines on "initial" and who nursed the Fort as though she were a baby. They kept the ship in condition so that neither the rarified stratosphere altitude nor cold down to 60 degrees below zero, nor flak nor cannon shell could prevent the battle-scarred ship from reaching her briefed target.

"Hard Luck" flew on no "milk runs." Her attitude was always purposeful besides there weren't many milk runs in the ETO. Besides the two bold daylight assaults on Berlin, the Fort's bombing visitations included such targets as Paris, Watten, Bordeaux, Vannes, Frankfurt, Schweinfurt, Duren, Munster, Bremen, Geslenskirchen, Solingen, Kiel, the Calais area of France, Rostock, Ludwigshafen, Brunswick, Romilly sur Seine, and Augsburg.

The man who brought the "Hard Luck" across the Atlantic was Captain Don Mitchell. Then Captain Loren Van Steenis took over. Things went on as usual. The motors and superchargers went right on. Van Steenis was a pet of the men in charge of the old ship. Especially after an incident that happened while he was flying with a load of bombs over the Pas de Calais.

As Van Steenis reported to the crew chief afterwards—

"We damned near lost one of those engines." This was the 29th mission for "Hard Luck" and her engines and superchargers had only run up a low total of flying time at this stage of the game.

"A chunk of flak came up through the fire wall and knocked a hole in the ship as big as my head." Van Steenis told Myers. "I was afraid that one of those engines was gone but when I checked I found that the flak had missed the engine by about six inches and had cut one of the return oil lines. I cut the line and everything was fine. But it was close. I was worried."

Myers went over the ship with the other three men in a fine-toothed comb inspection. He found that a chunk of flak had landed in the radio compartment after knifing through the right side of the ship and there were a couple of small holes in the immediate and uncomfortable vicinity of the pilot's compartment.

"See what I mean—" he said to Pete. "Here's a couple of holes in the cockpit—might have killed him, but he worries about the engines—that's a good pilot!"

"Hard Luck" finally went down—the trail of most ships who ran their luck out. But she went down with a proud and honored record that reflected nothing but achievement and honor on the men who had taken care of her. When she went down other men in the Squadron came to Myers and to the other members of the crew and tried to tell them they were sorry. It was like a bereavement. It was a loss.

The other man who got ahead along about this time, rightly so, was not a member of the Squadron. But he had been. Captain, now Major, Horace Varian, the Station Adjutant moved up into the job of Ground Executive, taking over the duties of the job from Lieutenant Colonel Utley who had been transferred out and back to the States.

On the twenty-first the ships flew to Ludwigshafen and then they stayed put for



the next seven days. Snow, rain, sleet and more snow. The static pools overflowed onto the roads and froze thickly. The buildings all leaked. Nature had one wild wicked spree. The men grumbled, cracking their heads and their anatomies on the icy pavements as they tried to ride the bikes to and from their work.

On the twenty-eighth the ships hit Duisburg and the following day they made a successful trip to Kassel. The Runstedt bulge was only a pimple now and the Russians were coming down fast to the Oder. The war was looking up and the weather was looking down. January came to a close with all hands on deck and no action in sight. The weather became just a shade milder as the month slipped through the fence of February and the Big Three, Churchill, Stalin, and the ailing Roosevelt, met in the Black Sea areas, at Yalta. The first month of a new year had been written off.

## XXIV

February. It was a good month. It was a month that saw achievement by the Allies and by the Group and by the Squadron. It was a month that saw the early feelers of Spring bringing nubbings of buds on the trees. It was a month that brought everyone's mind closer to home. What mattered now was time alone. The map on the wall behind the desk in the Orderly Room, the one that had been plain and unmarked, with only a tiny pencilled-in section near Finland that Christmas, 1943, now stood black, filled from one end to the other. Only the small center remained. Each day the pencil colored in a little more.

There was no mission on the first and the second passed. There was a cold tang in the air and plenty of overcast over England. If there were none over England, there was sure to be over the target area.

On the third, however, they did get off to fly across the North Sea, along the German coast, to swing down across the face of Berlin. They poured out a terrific pasting, aiming their bombs toward the Air Ministry and the other official buildings on the Wilhelmstrasse and Unter den Linden. As they turned, the exclamation mark of smoke behind them expressed the consternation of those on the ground.

The raid was not without its cost, however. For some men and some machines did not return. Major Robert Rosenthal—formerly our Commanding Officer—now CO of the 418th Squadron—went down for the second time. It looked as though he had it this time. But towards the end of the month, the news came through that this Brooklyn boy with the charmed life had made it again! He had gotten his ship as far east as the Oder, crashed there and had been rescued by the Russians who passed him on through the lines, across Poland into Moscow from where he returned to the Group. His luck had been pushed to the very limit!

The Russians were driving hard toward the Elbe and Dresden now. To aid them the planes took off on the morning of the sixth and headed for Chemnitz, the rail center in the southeastern portion of the Reich. They poured their bombs down to virtually eliminate Chemnitz as an effective control depot for the Germans. When they came back they left seven more officers and eleven more enlisted men, the crews belonging to Lieutenants Fellows and William Wilson. A couple of days later they showed up on the field, having had one of those Belgium vacations for a breather, while repairs and refueling were carried out. On the Chemnitz raid, too, Flight Officer Fritz Kretschmar was not so lucky. He got himself knocked in the head. The injury was thought at first to be a fractured skull—but was nothing more than a knock in the head!

It was not until the fourteenth that the ships flew again. The fourteenth was the day set aside for the field inspection by Major General E. E. Partridge, Commanding General of the 3rd Air Division and his Chief of Staff, Brigadier General Neil B. Harbould. But fly the air crews did—and went off again to deliver a final knockout blow to Chemnitz.

While they were flying the German skies the ground men, already very tired from the effort of getting the mission into the air, went through the annoying formalities of the inspection. Shoes had been shined, clothes pressed, medals, ribbons placed right, hair cut. The barracks and tents were spotless. The General's arrival was awaited with held breaths. On a schedule put forth from Group Headquarters his arrival in the Squadron area was set for ten past ten that morning. He arrived promptly at ten thirty-five. Through the Orderly Room, Supply Room, officers quarters, on through the area he swept with his party. They missed nothing. At least, Partridge and Harbould seemed to miss nothing. Their eyes probed knowingly into nooks and crannies for the slightest deviation from the accepted and desired. And when, twenty-five minutes later, flanked by motorcycle escort, their cars sped up the road towards the next victims, there was a weakened but pleased group still standing in front of the Orderly Room. Major Lyster, slick as a whistle, moustache ends bristling, Chandler, with his large stomach even tucked into place, Tienken, slim and self-conscious.

That wasn't all. No, sir! Later that day, after lunch, the men and the officers of the organization formed into platoons out on the road and marched away to the ramp where they stood the formalities of inspection. The wind blew, overcoat tails flapped but all went off fairly well. Major Lyster made a forthright appearance—most military—and Jim Fitch carried the fluttering guidon with all flourish. The men stood as straight as they could and tried to remember that, right now, they weren't workers but soldiers. The General walked up and down the ranks with unseeing eyes. Finally the men marched off the ramp, and went back to the area, changed their clothes from good into working clothes and went back to the ramp again to sweat their ships in. The General, having had his day, went on back to his Division and they said he had been pleased. He should have been! It took enough out of everyone.

On the fifteenth the ships went for targets in Ruhland and all came back safely, though, as was so usual these days, one crew, piloted by Carl Baker, was delayed en route back and came in the following day. Two days later the Major, himself, was forced down en route back from a mission but he made it back, too.

The nineteenth they hit Munster again. And on the following day it was Nuremberg, the home of the Nazi Party and site of the great manufacturing plants. The next day the ships went back to Nuremberg still again—and this time they all came back. Though enemy flak action had wounded Willis Bell in the side with flak and Louis Molback who, like Achilles, got it in the heel!

Washington's Birthday was celebrated with a nice raid on Hofingen and the following day they hit at the rail yards at Treuchlingen in advance of the onrushing Allied forces.

That same day Aubra Williamson, refueling man, was married in London. His wedding and reception were attended by a number of the men from the Squadron.

The twenty-fourth saw them over Bremen with devastation on the target. Munich the next day. And then a pause.

On the twenty-sixth Major Lyster became a Lieutenant Colonel. This was important. It was the first time out of all the seven commanders that the Squadron had had one of such high rank—this job called for a Lieutenant Colonel but the rest of them hadn't been around long enough to get the silver leaf. The new Colonel had broken the tabu that had existed over the promotion. Lyster made it.

Berlin, smouldering constantly now from RAF and USAAF attacks, caught another load on the twenty-sixth and all the men made it back safely. There was no mission on the following day. On this date another batch of ground men went off to the Reinforcement Depot to be trained as infantry replacements for the Western Front. In the batch that went Pat DeLeonardo of S-2, one of the early members of the Squadron and had seen some two years' service with the organization.

The month wound up with another visitation on Kassel, the rail and munitions

center. They reported that they had carried out their mission with success and that the rail service through Kassel—like Spring—would be a little late this year.

## XXV

The first sun of March found the ships sitting in their dispersals with nothing on tap for the day. It was a blustery day and the war was routine. To the east the Allied forces had wedged themselves against the Roer and bided their time. Farther east the armies of the Russians forced themselves through the gaps of Czechoslovakia and Austria, across the plains of Poland and Pomerania. Berlin moved closer to the spotlight. But those armies nearest the city—the armies of Marshal Zhukov—sat on the banks of the Oder, biding their time.

Meanwhile, in the Squadron, this beginning of March came as a hope. The first few days began slowly. About six in the morning, just as the sun began to come up out of Germany and the North Sea, you could see the German rockets being fired out of Holland towards London. All of a sudden in the morning sky there would be the finger trail of the rocket—straight as an arrow from the horizon almost to the zenith. A moment later it would collapse slowly in zig-zag lines. They realized that by the time they saw this vapor trail that same rocket would have already landed with an earth-cracking smack in London or vicinity.

But the Germans were playing a losing game. The rockets were becoming infrequent as the Allies overran their launching grounds and the Germans were forced to move back into the north and east. The flying bomb was almost a thing of the past. Only now and then would the Germans futilely rig one up on the back of the old bombers and come in from the North Sea to try and fling it south towards the London area. Now and then in the evenings they would come over in ones and twos to try and cause some nuisance. That was about all it was.

On the second the ships took off for Dresden to dump their load on the city's rail yards in an effort to help the advancing Russians who, by now, had reached a point not more than fifty miles from the city. And they went off to Brunswick again the following day, that familiar target that had occupied them so often in the past two years.

It was not until the seventh that they went out again. This time to Siegen flying in clear weather for a change to effectively score their target. All returned safely and reported good results. This made the fifth mission running that all personnel had returned without casualty either to machine or man and was a pretty apt commentary on the growing state of things within the Reich.

On the ninth the ships hit Frankfurt and the following day found them over Dortmund hitting at the yards there and the terminus end of the Dortmund-Ems canal so vital to the Reich inter-shipping. On the eleventh Hamburg. Then they rested. But the rest was only temporary. For on the Western Front the fires of battle were beginning to gleam. A giant smoke screen blew west from the Rhine and covered what was to come from the eyes of the Germans and from the world.

On the morning of the fourteenth the ships flew a mission over Hanover to block some of the German rail network with destruction. The mission, however, was not without a blemish. For in the flak curtain which rose over the stricken city Alex Nazemetz was wounded in the neck by a jag of metal. He was rushed to the hospital upon his return and for a while it looked very grave. Within three weeks he was back with the Squadron.

The following day they went to a point just twelve miles north of Berlin to hit at a rail junction with some success.

The ships remained idle then until the eighteenth when they struck at the rail yards in the outlying portions of the Berlin area. All returned safe this time except for John Silva who got himself a slight scratch in the eye from a close shave of flak.

On the twenty-first the ships lent a helping hand to the Rhine offensive by plastering the target at Plazen, all returning safely with the exception of the crew headed by



Bernard Painter. Some people said this one exploded in mid-air. No one ever knew so long as the war lasted.

On the twenty-second they hit Alhorn and on the following day they were over Unna. And the morning of the twenty-fourth came in clear and beautiful.

Spring had come at last. And right on time, too. Other things had come—especially to the Germans. For out of the cloud banks that Montgomery had manufactured and the clear-viewed banks of the Rhine came the British and the Americans, swarming over the river in planes and boats. Across the skies over England, across the field at Thorpe Abbott, the Halifaxes and Lancasters pulled their cumbersome gliders to points beyond the Rhine where they cast them loose. Others vomited their bellies-full of paratroopers who floated to the ground to hold it for the troops coming across the river. The ships of the Squadron were there, too. For they took off at 0600 to fly to Steenwijk, Holland, to spread their bombs over the German airfield. Then they came back home, loaded up again and went off at 1330 hours to Ziegenheim, Holland to strike at grounded Nazi aircraft. When the sun sank behind Diss that night the race for Berlin had begun at last.

Fortune had chosen to smile on the Allies in the weather eye at last. It was good weather and maybe it would stay that way. Morale went up with the thermometer!

The next day, following the Rhine crossing, the weather was rainy. And the next day it was rainy. It stayed lousy for four days. The ships went out to Hanover which was not as far from friendly lines this time as it had been on the previous trip earlier in the month.

On the thirteenth they went to Hamburg and on the last day of March they took a crack at Bad Burka-Zietz without a casualty. The month ended. With it Germany's pride, Germany's hopes, Germany's fiction of victory. What remained was actually a mopping up period. For some Americans had clinched the battle. The bridge—Remagen—the river, the Rhine. They were spilling through the gap, flooding into the inner sanctum that was the home defense of the German people. The die had been cast. The last act had a slow curtain but already the curtain was coming down.

## XXVI

Perhaps in the years that follow the war there will arise out of the ashes and rubble of remembrance another Gibbons who will be able to chronicle the month clearly and accurately. This month stood alone and outstanding in the procession of months and held within its circle a melodramatic play of glory, tragedy, a good hope—most moving events in the history of modern man. This was the month of full fruition.

The first two days of April the ships did not fly but on the third they took off for Kiel and the great German shipyards. The mission encountered light and inaccurate flak, no fighter opposition—apparently there was little of the Luftwaffe left—and all returned safely. They finished their job at Kiel the following day when they loaded up their bombs and paid a return visit to the naval port. On the fifth they flew into the interior of German-held ground to aid the Third Army in Southern Germany, bombing Nuremberg again.

On the sixth the ships flew still farther east to hit Leipzig. Two more replacement crews came in from Stone and orders came out releasing Major John Gibbons from the post of Operations Officer, transferring him to the Group detachment. He had completed his second tour of duty and awaited transportation home. In his place, as Squadron Operations officer was named Captain Charles Robbs, West Point graduate, quiet, shy, awkward.

The next day the ships went to Buchen and returned—without casualty. This day—the seventh—also saw another infantry shipment going out to replace the men lost on the Front. In it went a good number of well-known men—Johnsie Capps, John Lamartine, Richard Bissel, Melecio Garcia, Diego Henandez, Harold Milway, Antonio Barbosa, Raymond Daniel, Walter Kane, Faraon Chapa, Angelo Genovese, and John Atkinson. It was a large, healthy shipment with a number of men who had been with

the outfit since leaving the States. It still didn't seem quite right to ship them out like that. But nothing could be done. Orders were orders. This was the third shipment.

On the eighth the ships took a crack at Eger, Czechoslovakia in aid of the Russians and came back from this long flight without loss. The tenth saw them heading for Burg and this time they were not quite as lucky. Flak rose out of the German town and one burst caught one of the aircraft, wounding Flight Officer Rothfarb in the leg and Lieutenant Krumpholz in the leg, while an enlisted man, Anthony Bacewicz, caught it in the knee.

On the eleventh they went off to Landshut and the twelfth found them grounded for the day.

The first news came on the midnight broadcast over the British Broadcasting System. It began abruptly, without preamble—

"It is with the deepest regret"—the announcer read—"that we announce the death of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in Warm Springs, Georgia, this afternoon." A few, ordinary, arranged words that brought a phase of Americana to an end.

The reaction in London was instant. Englishmen knew they had lost a great friend and staunch defender in the man Roosevelt. They talked in little clusters on the streets, in the pubs, in the theatre—anywhere—to express their personal condolence. They asked the question that was in everyone's mind.

"Who is this man Truman?" They asked. The American soldiers who had been removed from the Presidential campaign by wartime found they knew as little about the new President as the man in the street in England. Truman became the enigma of the day.

I went down towards St. Paul's the day of the memorial service for the late President. There were many people packed along the Strand, down along Fleet Street, through Ludgate Circus up the slow rise to the wide apron in front of the mighty church. A vast throng gathered along the sides of the streets to watch the procession of great and near-great as they filed to the cathedral to pay their respects in memory of the American leader. I edged my way through the crowd. You could see just about everything there. British Tommies in their thick woolen battle dress. British Navy women in their Nelson hats and their black stockings. ATS girls. Land Army in their knee-length knickers. American WACs. American GIs. Officers and enlisted personnel intermingling with the people of London, children, men, women. Though there were so many lining the streets there was very little noise. A stillness lay over the narrow streets and the hour seemed very sad. As though Time had taken a respite from the war to come within the walls of the City to pay its respects.

The notables came. They came up the hill from the Circus swinging around the semi-circle in front of the grey, time-stained face of the church. Their vehicles stopped and they got out mounting the steps of the cathedral to disappear inside the doors. The churchmen waited to welcome them as they came. Now a black shiny car swung around the gravel and rolled up before the steps. The churchmen came forward and received Winston Churchill, small, pudgy, looking almost this day like a sad caricature of himself. He touched his hat and bowed to the churchman and then went up the steps alone. This was his saddest hour. His friend was gone. The people of London and the world watched him go into the church. They were grieved for him—with him. He carried into the church their bereavement as well as his. Another car and received by the men on the steps their Majesties, the King and Queen of England. And the two Princesses, Elizabeth and Margaret Rose. The Royal Family clustered for a moment around the men on the steps. Before them had come Churchill, the Prime Minister, and friend of Roosevelt. And the King of Norway. The King of Greece—exiled. King Peter and his bride of Yugo-Slavia. Exiled. The Duchess of Kent and her children. The representatives of countries in exile and the representatives of countries now liber-

ated. Ambassador John Winant, American representative to the Court of St. James. The great and near great and the ordinary. Some American soldiers, sailors and WACs. All gathered under the blitzed dome of St. Paul's to pay tribute to the man who was America's leader and Britain's friend.

Back on the field, where the men took the news together as they took everything, the shock was deeply felt. Somehow you felt that not only the Commander-in-Chief was gone, but a friend, a household member. Someone you felt you knew personally. It wasn't the passing of an era. It was the passing of a neighbor. The Squadron watched a week-end pass into the dignity of sorrowful history. Somehow a little particle of good had been snatched from the world in the middle of a sunny afternoon in a little house in Georgia. In front of the Headquarters building the flag lopped dismally for the rest of April and the beginning of May.

On the fourteenth the ships went to Royan to aid the French in driving the hold-out Germans from their isolated West Coast ports. And then went back on the following day to dislodge a few more stubborn Jerries. On the sixteenth they engaged in similar tactics at Point De Grave, France.

April was slipping away. What remained was only the token of Germany. Monty stood in the north. Patton to the east. And on the seventeenth the ships went to Czechoslovakia to bomb the rail center of Aussig in aid of General Patton. The eighteenth saw them repeating the gesture when they bombed the rail center of Straubing, again in Czechoslovakia—and then as the Russians secured their stranglehold on the already-doomed rubble pile that had been Berlin, the ships went off on the twentieth of April to drop their eggs once again—for the last time—on Berlin, the city that had been the hub of a dream. They came back, safe and sound, wafting into the field in a routine orderly manner. As they came up the perimeter, their engine roars punctuated with the odd little squeaks of brakes constantly applied, they edged into the dispersals, returned from their mission. The 20th of April, 1945. Their last combat mission of World War II. The war in the air was over. The work was not.

Just about this time Bernie Salmond, who had been one of the original armorers, fell ill. Examination found that he must return to the States for further treatment. Bernie was very popular and the men shook his hand and wished him well.

They watched the last of the infantry replacements go, too. Louis Levy, Gordys Diers, the blonde husky farmer's kid who had been a driver with the Squadron in the States, Robert Walker and Jack Marschall, who hadn't wanted to go at all. They said good-bye to Tom Madel on the twenty-first, too. Good old Tom. He had been a ground man, top man in the communications department. Now he was returning to the States for a discharge, worked out on the business of returning to a vital industry.

Jake left, too. Good old Jake Skaggs. He had been Charge of Quarters for a long time, doing a good job. Then when Jim Fitch replaced him in that job, they wracked their brains and finally put him into the Station Post Exchange with Red Hartnett and Captain Paul. He worked there happily until the rulings came through about transferring out the over-age men and he went along on the long road back to the States.

There were some others who were pressing that over-age ruling, too. Denny Polver, the mail man, was almost eligible and he had an offer for work in a vital industry but Colonel Lyster put his foot down and refused to let the mail man go. "Essential." The word that broke many a man's heart was tacked onto Denny. He sulked and raved and went on sorting the mail, waiting for his chance. Red Hartnett was almost eligible, too. But Red was philosophical. If he got a chance to go home, the red-haired Irishman would go. If not, well, he was the big wheel at the Post Exchange, happily sitting on top of the world there. He could wait. But he'd get back, too, one of these days. In the meantime the rest of the men who were neither over-age nor under-age went about their business, swallowing their powdered eggs for breakfast, having their tough chicken



on Sunday, going on their passes, watching the war maps. They figured that everyone would be going home pretty soon.

April went out—and May came in—in a snowstorm!

## XXVII

As the snow fell on the countryside of Norfolk a very good thing came to the Squadron. Major Gale W. Cleven came back from the other side and sat with his men again.

The Major, who had gone down on the 8th of October, 1943, came back. He had gone down on his twentieth mission with a tremendous record of achievement and glory behind him. When he had gone down he had taken with him the heart of the Squadron as well. All the months that had slipped by since he had languished behind the barbed-wire of German camps. Now he came home to us. A little thinner and a little harder—but home.

The men were satisfied and happy. And the men who had come after his disappearance had heard the fabulous tales of his legend so when he came back, they met him with interest, with speculation. Then they were glad and satisfied, too.

Cleven had been taken back to a prison camp in the eastern section of Germany. There he and Eagen, his friend, and most of the others from the Squadron who had gone down one time or another met in reunion and together they sweated out the war's end. They had heard and seen the Americans coming over to bomb targets near by; in fact, they had a few narrow escapes from the bombs of their own Squadrons' ships! And, finally as the Russians came pressing closer and closer from the east, the Germans had bundled up the prisoners, stringing them out in long columns, starting on the long and weary trek to the south where, in the redoubt, they thought they might be able to set up a new camp. They walked down through the core of Germany. Americans were coming from the west. Russians from the east. They came down near Regensburg where the Major had won his Distinguished Service Medal. The Major and a friend whom he met on the trek decided they'd had enough walking—on German time. So, in the night, they bided their time, watching for an opening. When it came they fled, heading west to intercept the oncoming Third Army. Through the lines they came, sometimes walking, sometimes on some truck, sometimes on a "borrowed" jeep, heading back to England. Finally they were back. Bucky Cleven came back to his Squadron.

He hadn't changed so very much. He was a little quieter but, maybe, that was because at first there were so many people around that he did not know. He held an impromptu session out on the grassy plot behind the supply room, talking with the men, telling what he could. They just sat in the grass and looked up at him, welcoming him gratefully with their eyes. He met everyone. It seemed as though everyone wanted to meet Cleven. The legend of his exploits had grown. He had become a symbol of the days of the first of the many. He was still very much the warrior. He was still very much the shy and diffident character when it came to being lionized, too.

He was around for a week or more. He managed to make deals with Captain Paul at the Post Exchange for full cartons of candy bars and he sat around batting the breeze for hours on end, chewing candy bars as though they were a drug or a mania with him. Those who accepted his offers of candy soon grew tired of them, but he went right on. Eating and talking, eating candy bars. It was even worse than it had been in the old days! Perhaps he was making up for lost time.

He was set to leave for the States on the eighth of May. The men resolved that they had to give him something to take back with him, something from them. From the Squadron. They rustled around the shops of Bury St. Edmunds and Ipswich and finally they got what they wanted. One night they lured him into coming up into Barracks 9. When he entered he found that most of the old crowd had assembled in the packed barracks. Larry Bowa, who knew him probably the best of anyone there, made his speech. They led him over to uncover the silver service they had pooled their

pounds to buy. It was a beauty—and on the bottom they had had engraved the words—

“To Gale W. Cleven from the 350th Bomb Squadron.”

They had something else for him, too. A chromatic watch. They almost didn't get the chance to give it to him. Cleven stood there, looking down at the silver service, trying not to let it come. But come it did anyway. He turned around and he was crying—not just tears in the eyes—but crying right out! He tried to grin.

“I'm just a baby,” he said thickly and stumbled out of the barracks into the night. The men looked at each other helplessly. There's something terrible about a man's tears. Even tears of joy. They stood silently and felt helpless in the middle of the barracks and didn't know what to do next. Finally someone came to and they cautiously decided to give the Major his watch, too, and get it all over with. Then, they figured, he could have a good cry. So someone went out—I think it was his “little chum,” Major Varian—and got hold of him and brought him back. They gave him the watch. He couldn't say anything. Just stood there with his watch in his hand, looking dumbly grateful. He turned and fled the barracks, going down the road in the drizzle alone, without a raincoat. He was gone for hours.

I'll have to hand it to Colonel Lyster through this week. He was a man with the kind of temperament that more or less demands number one place. He had been Commanding Officer of the unit now for almost six months. He was a Lieutenant Colonel. And then, suddenly, out of the past, came the fabulous Cleven. The men, and the officers as well, deserted Lyster to flock around the man who had come back. Lyster took his place like a gentleman. He sat back, almost faded into the background. For the time that Cleven was there, Lyster virtually handed back the CO's job to the number one man. There had been seven CO's since—but for the week of Cleven's return, all of them were forgotten. Lyster took his back seat very gracefully and spoke only when the men wanted him to speak. I think in the one week that Cleven was there, Lyster did himself proud. The men appreciated his silence and his voluntary assumption of the secondary place. He had accepted the Major and recognized his worth to the ground men. In turn they looked upon him with new appreciation and regard.

So Cleven spent this week with the men, his men. They clustered about him. He spent evenings in the barracks with them, in their tents, sitting around the Orderly Room in the same old careless way that he had before. Cap tilted back on his head, his right leg swung lazily over the arm of a chair, turning the clock back nineteen months. Suddenly it was the eighth of May and he was gone again—this time back to the States.

### XXVIII

During the first week in May the first of the “chow hound” missions was set. The Ordnance Men and the Armorers were engaged in something new this time. Instead of loading bombs and incendiary material they were loading packages of food and sacks of flour into the bomb bays. Food for the relief of the starving populations of Holland whose complete liberation came in the first days of May.

Up on the line in the dark hours the ground men loaded food into the Forts and they went off on this new kind of mission. They flew over across the North Sea to sweep in low over Holland, breaking the coast at an altitude of no more than a few hundred feet. They headed for an abandoned air field where, on the grounds edging the flat strip, were hundreds of eager, hungry Dutch. Coming in low they released their load in the same manner as they had released their bombs not so very long ago. The food would spill away from the ships and scatter along the ground, the sacks of flour striking the ground, sometimes bursting open, splotching the earth with white streak marks. Then, their food delivered, the ships would break from their formation and go winging at house-top level, zooming and careening independent of each other swinging over the cities and towns, villages and fields of the low country, skating along over the roads and the canals. The men in the big ships would wave and salute the

people below. People lined along the streets, in the squares, waved newspapers and handkerchiefs and now and then a whole sheet in their excitement and joy.

The message that the war was over, that the agreements had been signed at Rheims in the "little red school house" came over the teletype about ten o'clock on the morning of the seventh of May. The official announcement was to be made the following day—by Marshal Stalin in Moscow, by Winston Churchill in London and by Harry Truman in Washington. Peace was here! The European war was done, finished, ended! The bars slipped into place. From noon of Tuesday extending through to midnight of Wednesday the 8th the field was restricted. No man was allowed off the post. A few lucky ones, hearing of the impending restriction, fled to London ahead of the bar—but most of them were locked in.

There was a food mission that day to Amsterdam. We crossed a glittering channel, smooth and oily, and came across the coast just south of the harbor. We got rid of the food and then swung over the city, liberated only three days before. From every building flew the flags of the House of Orange and, as we skittered along over the streets and canals, we came over the great square in front of the palace. A great mob of people had gathered. They must have been told of the surrender on the seventh. For they stood black against the square, raising their handkerchiefs and their hats and their hands, waving, and you could see that they were shouting at the big plane with the star on its wings. Off in the distance there were the vivid yellows and reds of the tulip beds miraculously preserved through all of this, shining in their Maytime splendor. This was the world worth waiting for.

At three next afternoon the tired voice of Winston Churchill came over the BBC. All the deviltry, all the suffering and privations of the war had come to an end. Peace was here. There was still the Japanese to fight and defeat. We listened to Churchill and remembered Roosevelt dead less than a month and regretted he couldn't have lived for this moment. The band played the Star Spangled Banner and the Internationale and God Save the King. The war was wrapped up in the middle of an afternoon. The men grunted, got up off their bunks and went on back to the line to their jobs. War or no war—they had to go to work. The 8th of May, 1945. The same day the Major left the Squadron to return to the States. It was a strange, wonderful coincidence—how he had come back and the war ended, all of a sudden-like.



## PART 5

MAY 1945 TO AUTUMN 1945

### I

You'd think that once the war ended all the rest of the guff would end, too. Not likely. In fact, it was only the beginning of the hardest period of all. For, somehow, while the war was going on, while we had something to do that was constructive, something concrete and definite, aimed at the goal of getting the thing over with—we had a peace of mind. Once the war ended—we lost that. Gone were the days that ran together and came out as months in the end. The map over the desk in the Orderly Room was all blacked in and over the face of it a great black cross. The legend penciled in the upper left hand corner—"Rheims, France—2:40 a. m. 7 May, 1945" was all that was left of that project.

During the month the men continued their furloughs and passes without interruption, other than the brief momentary pause for V-E Day. Towards the end of the month the introduction of a military training program—the peace-time army was here!—necessitated the restriction of all personnel to the base on each Saturday and Sunday in order to complete the program to the satisfaction of higher headquarters.

The crews were in a peculiar position. Their work was done. The older ones



would apparently be shipped on back home. The newer ones were to be utilized in missions into Germany and Austria and France to bring back prisoners of war who were being released all over Europe. A sort of ATC project. They were to fly missions to Casablanca taking returning personnel down there to connect with services to fly them back to the States. They carted refugees all over Germany, flew food missions and the rubber-neck tours over the Ruhr and parts of Western Germany.

On the night of the eleventh of May the point system was announced over the AFN radio network. In every office, every tent, every barracks, wherever there was a radio, the men listened intently as the valuations were given. Each bronze battle star was worth five points. The Squadron had been awarded four. That was twenty points right there. Then one point for every month of service. Most of the men averaged about thirty-six months. That made thirty-six more points. A point for every month overseas. The Squadron had been overseas twenty-three months. Twenty-three more points. That made a total of seventy-nine points for the majority. Then, of course, if you had a kid—you got twelve more points. Some of the men soared into the heights with that. A medal brought five more. The men like Strain and Jackson and DeLeeuw and Leypoldt and the rest who held the Bronze Star for their work got five more on that one. The critical score for discharge was set at eighty-five. When the smoke cleared away the Orderly Room staff checked the records and found that some fifty men had above the critical score. One hundred and eighty-five were within the lunatic fringe—seventy-five to eighty-five points. The balance shrugged their shoulders and settled down for the long wait.

From the time the announcement was made reason was displaced by rumor. Every clerk was greeted with the intense "What's news on the points?" on the road, in the office, in the mess hall and in the barracks. Each day brought a new crop of rumors. There was a possibility of two more battle stars being awarded the unit. That would bring the other one hundred and eighty-five up over the eighty-five mark. As the month wore itself out in sheer exhaustion an order came through for the transfer of all the men of over eighty-five points. It wasn't easy for the men who held points just under eighty-five. But they went on hoping and waiting.

Among the highest point men in the outfit—those with over a hundred points at that time—were Riley Dempsey, youngster and crew chief who was married and had a child which boosted his total, already large with long service, and good old Pedro Garza with three children totalled against his tally. They went off to the States right at the first.

Colonel Lyster called a meeting of the unit in the newly-created baseball diamond—where the calisthenics were now given four times daily—to hear a letter from Colonel Sutterlin who had taken over the Group from Colonel Jeffrey some time previously. Sutterlin attempted to inform the men of the Group what was happening. He wrote a letter in which he outlined the probable course of their future. It was simply this. The Group was scheduled to become a part of the Army of Occupation. It would be hard work but it was a job to be done—et cetera. The men scuffed the ground with the toes of their GI shoes and thought of home and hoped they could do as the Colonel asked. He hadn't set a date on the move to Germany—for they would move over the continent as soon as it was possible—so there was some small measure of hope in that. Perhaps, before the axe fell, something would happen. Maybe, the two stars would come in.

Lyster's orders were in to return to the States. He packed his bags and finally pulled out. Not that Denny Polver cared much—since the Colonel had blocked his return home. He turned over the command of the Squadron to the Operations Officer, Captain Charles E. Robbs, the West Point man, quiet, neat, interesting. This was the beginning of June. The eighth commanding officer of the unit.

## II

The month of June began a gradual disintegration of the unit. True, as the old men went out, new low-point men from other outfits around the ETO came in to take their place. But they were new—and so many of the old men were to go out in the weeks to come that it was like it had been away back in the training days in the States. When the Squadron was being built up piece by piece. Only this time it was being broken down, piece by piece.

So on the third of June Riley Dempsey, Stanley Dudziuk—the Polish boy who had served in the RAF as well as with the USAAF—Harmon Thomas, Pedro, and Joe Halda set out for home. The high point men. The day before, Max Kushner, in London with Arthur Ernst, had been involved in an accident, suffering a severe head injury was transferred out of the unit as well, to be sent home to recover. And two days later, Bill Logsdon, who had missed the high point shipment, got orders by himself and followed the original five men on home.

The older crews went on to Stone and from there to home as well. The new crews sat around and flew the ATC stuff under the guidance of the new Operations Officer, Captain Don C. Liljenquist. Charles Robbs, the new CO, was a Major now.

The clerks worked like fury to get records ready while the First Sergeant and the Adjutant went off on pass to avoid the job. On the eighth the forty-one men with eighty-five points or more were sent out to four bomb groups scheduled to be returned to the States. The 95th, the 493rd, the 390th and the 452nd. Al Strain, Bob Everett, Bill Jackson, Bill Leypoldt, Jim Fitch, Larry Bowa, Louis Hays, the list read like a who's who in the Squadron. All the original "old" men of the unit went out and, when they went, most of the top department jobs were vacated. Of all the older men who were given the opportunity to make the move, only one refused. John Riffle, the West Virginia songster, hung his guitar back on the barracks wall and decided to stay with the occupation. Most people thought Johnny had gone absolutely nuts. But he apparently knew what he wanted.

On the morning of the eighth the men who were going—and the men who were staying—gathered together in the road outside the area. The ones who were staying behind watched the others as they climbed up into the trucks. This was the first major break. This was the beginning of the end of the life that most of them had known for a long, long time. This was the start of the finish. The trucks roared off down the road and the little knots of men who hadn't had enough points to make the hurdle stood and waved to the ones who had.

London was a peaceful place now. No bombs. No alerts. No excitement. The lights, while not bright by American standards, had come on again. You could see around Piccadilly and the side streets of Soho were not the forbidden lanes they had been. It looked garish and obscene to see the lights streaming out of the unshaded windows of apartments and buildings.

On the twenty-fifth Captain John W. "Doc" Hardy, the Squadron Surgeon for so long as the mind of man remembered, was transferred over to the homeward bound 390th Bomb Group. The only "Doc" the Squadron ever had. We missed Doc Hardy after he was gone. His place was taken by Captain William P. Britsche.

On the twenty-fifth another batch of men with points from eighty to eighty-five went out of the unit. Transferred to a home-bound Group with no assurance that they, being under the critical score, wouldn't be headed for the Pacific once their home furlough was done.

The month went by and came to an end. Like the "begats" of the Bible, its history was the the listing of men coming and going and those involved in the keeping of the records began to feel that the 70th Reinforcement Depot had moved from Stone to Thorpe Abbott. Every heart carried the hope of an "early liberation." The hope that the two little insignificant bronze stars for battle participation—so small and silly

that most of the men had never worn them on their ETO ribbon—and now worth five points each—the hope that they would come through was constant.

### III

In July they did come through! All the men who had seventy-five points and up found that all of a sudden they had eighty-five and up. The heart of the Squadron was light and happy and free. The hour of liberation was nigh. But nothing happened. A few men went out. David Fayssoux and Graydon Tirey. But they were emergency cases. John Moseley, but he was over-age. The rest of them just sat.

Down in his tent the carpenter, Ken Retz, worked feverishly to make shipping crates out of bomb boxes. They piled up alongside his tent and gave evidence to the fact that sooner or later the Group was going to up and leave for the other side.

The new base commander, Colonel John Wallace—Lieutenant Colonel—who had succeeded Colonel Sutterlin when the latter went on back to the States was “agin” everything! He didn’t want to take the Group to the continent with inexperienced personnel, didn’t want to face the movement with personnel who were not skilled. He worked diligently to do everything in his power to block any transfers out of the unit of trained personnel, enlisted or commissioned. The statement was passed around that, regardless of points held, Wallace would not okeh the release of any officer until after they had gone to the continent. Whether or not this was true was doubtful. It was extremely doubtful that, even if he so desired to block the movements, he had the authority to do so. The men hoped not.

With the removal of the top ranking enlisted men on the movement of June and the first part of July there were vacancies for promotion. Here, again, Wallace interfered. He permitted a limited number of promotions to line men and specialists. When it came to the clerical end of the group that department which was, with the point system and the transfers, doing the bulk of the work, Wallace put down the clamps. No promotions. It was a small trick, since the clerical ratings, like the line, were limited and a good many men had waited for over a year or more to get their reward for work well done. But Wallace, either through ignorance of the situation or through some personal whim, blocked each promotion, causing a wave of resentment on the part of the men who had been with the Group for a long time. A much longer, harder time than Wallace had.

On the Fourth of July the second large batch of over-point men went to the four Groups and their replacements came in promptly.

During the month things went smoothly. Captain Paul and other members of the Group went off to Paris now and then and brought back perfume and other items. The Group heads and sometimes the Squadron ones, too, flew into Germany and probed around the future home of the Group, surveying the housing conditions, seeing what would have to be done to make the bombed Luftwaffe base habitable through the coming winter months. A couple of men in the Squadron had been fortunate enough to get over to Paris on a pass earlier—George Gouin and Jay Q. Mill—but the plan for extending this privilege went up the chimney and nothing came of it.

The British decided to stir things up. They held their general election and then withheld the announcement of the results until the Potsdam conference was well under way. On the 25th of July they counted the votes and, to their surprise as well as to the surprise of the men in the Squadron, they found they had bounced Winston Churchill out of office and put in Clement Atlee and his Labor government. The shoe was on the other foot. Three months earlier the British had asked the Americans—“who is this man Truman?” Now the Americans wondered who this man Atlee was.

The first of August was approaching. Each man had his hope and his thoughts and the folks at home being told by press and radio that the last of the Eighth Air Force was home, wrote and wondered how come. The men took a look around the



cities and towns and bases in England. It looked as if there were a good number of Eighth Air Force men still around.

In the middle of July the Squadron had gotten another First Sergeant. A low point one. So that the high point one could go home. Sergeant Manning for Sergeant Chandler. The days teetered on the brink of August.

#### IV

Towards the closing days of July I was placed on order to be transferred to a unit stationed at Division Headquarters—the 1092nd Signal Company. They were rumored to be alerted for a move back to the States by October 1. This was almost August 1.

I was the only man from the Squadron who was going on this shipment. That made me feel a little on the abandoned side.

I packed up my duffle bag and cleared the field. I turned in my excess equipment and the stuff I wouldn't need any longer. The carbine, the four blankets I had been issued plus the three that I had managed to swipe from the Supply Room during the cold winter months. I cleaned out what I couldn't carry with me, gave my massive soap collection away. I was ready to go. My duffle bag and the barracks bag that held the overflow stood by the door of the tent and I had said the good-byes. I loaded the bags into the jeep and they drove me down to Station Headquarters where, with four other men, I was given my records and pushed into a GI truck that was to take me over the twenty-five miles of hill and flat to Thetford, to Elvedon Hall, to Division, to the 1092nd Signal Company. It would have been much better if all of us, four hundred odd of the men of the 350th, could have packed together, left and come back to the States in one group. We'd been through so much together, good, bad, indifferent. But always together. The truck coughed, backed out into the road and swung away from the front of the Headquarters building. It went down the road past the chapel, where I had been on Christmas Eves and during the year. Down past the buildings on the hill, the combat mess halls, the Sergeant's club where I had been so often to the drunken hilarious brawls that I would remember, past the Officers Club where I had been only once—the day they opened it for an "Open House" when the war ended. Around the curve and down towards the Quartermaster buildings with the big coal compound in front, barbed wire and guarded by a bored and indifferent GI. Past the officers site and then alongside the farm. Past the red-brick two-story gabled house, along the brick wall past the pig sty from where the homey aromas had filtered on the way to and from our meals at the Mess Hall. Down past the 349th area, past the hay stacks, along the beet field across which you could see the sewage disposal plant, past the static pool where they dumped livid green dye to kill off the mosquitoes—the coloring that had come to the surface overnight, that everyone thought was a phenomenon of some sort. Down the road past the old farmer sitting on his two-wheeled cart, the old man, the young man, his family to whom we had said "hello" for two years and a half on that road to the horse pasture. Then up the little rise past the apple tree that hadn't bloomed this spring of all springs, up past the area. There was the picket post and Denny Polver's mail room and, behind it, the officers quarters. The officers' latrine, the washroom, the Supply room. The Orderly Room with the circular Squadron insignia almost faded away, screwed to the left of the door and the rosebush that Major Cleven had planted almost two years before, now sprawling alongside the building. It had a rose on it this summer for the first time. And the sign that hung on chains in the middle of the grass in front of the office. "350th Bomb Squadron." The two rows of tents and barracks over near the trees. The road up into the area and the barracks with the wire protection facing the ball diamond. The niessen huts along the north end of the area and finally the Armorer's barracks and then nothing but that plowed field between the area and the road that led to the gate. A sharp turn to the left, down past site six on the right, the Squadron area across the field to the left, over near the clump of trees. The truck spun down

the road with its high hedges and you were at the gate. The guard in his white helmet was waving you on and the truck turned right on the road to Diss and went up the little incline to the top of the hill; down the long road to the Horseshoes at the bottom and the windmill; up again and through Scole, past the King's Head, past the Inn, past the low lands and the little bridge over the Waveny river into Diss. Past the road that led to the railroad station, under the LNER bridge into town. Past the picture house and the church in the V of the street that served as a British USO, down the road that led past the Women's Voluntary Services Club for Servicemen, down into the countryside that was more wooded and more attractive than the one you had left. You sat there in the bouncing end of the truck, watching the scenery fly past, hanging on as the truck rounded the curves of the narrow road. You felt the sting of tears and the awful hollow feeling that you had just lost something very close to you. It was gone—and there was no way of getting it back. What you had just been looking at was something you *had* to remember. Because, as the days and the months and the years went by from this time on, that would be the only thing you'd have to remember. You sat there swallowing hard, blinking back the wet suspicion and knew you couldn't let the others see. The foolish sentimental outlook! But, when you looked at them, they were just sitting there like you—looking out of the rear end of the canopied truck, staring down the road that led back to Thorpe Abbott. They weren't saying anything. Just sitting and watching, each thinking his own thought.

## V

I stayed one week with the Signal Company. After that I went to Stone, to the Reinforcement Depot, for shipment back to the States as a "casual." And what was the fate of the others? The men whom I had left, still waiting to get on the road home?

Immediately following my departure from the Squadron, higher headquarters issued orders whereby all officers and enlisted men possessing over seventy-five points were to be transferred to units of all descriptions eventually slated for return to the States during the coming fall and early winter. This move would, then, account for all of the "original" Squadron personnel and start them on the path to home. Their vacated places at Thorpe Abbott were to be filled by low-point men from the designated units, the exchange being made on a man-for-man basis, with every effort expended to make it a job-for-job replacement as well. This gigantic, complex shuffle of men all over Eastern England was scheduled and actually did take place on the 8th of August, 1945.

All the movements would be coordinated, taking place at the same time, so that the outgoing men from the Groups would be replaced by incoming men. Thus the housing situation would not become acute in any one instance.

The orders went down to the 100th Group, to the 350th Squadron. Before they did, however, there was an opening for a carpenter on a returning Chemical Company's lists. Kenneth Retz of the 350th made the boat by the skin of his teeth and sailed for home on the 4th of August. The rest of the men hung on those lists.

On the day I left Division for Stone, on the first lap home, the men of the Squadron left for their new units. The GI trucks came on schedule, picking them up at the Squadron area, carting them over the roads of Norfolk to their new Groups. In their place came a whole raft of new men, new faces, new names. In the short space of an hour, the 350th, as we knew it, ceased to be. The men of the 350th were scattered from one end of Eastern England to the other. Tucked in little units wherever there was an opening for the trip back. They went happily, figuring it was, after all, a step on the road home. It was too bad the unit couldn't have returned to the States as it had left. All of us together.

## VI

Going home was much the same as coming over. Only, going home, you didn't care as much about the right and wrong way. If you answered the wrong roll, took the wrong step, you shrugged. After all, it was over. And, after all, you'd had a long

time of all this. Things came naturally now. You lined up, called out your name, shouldered your duffle bag and went on up the gang plank. At last, your feet were on the slippery metal deck. Now the rest was up to them. Take me home, Boat.

Finding a bunk. Tiers of them. Six high. Five high. Army cots along the passageways and in the corners. This was no luxury ride. But you were going home! Pick out a bunk. Canvas center roped onto iron pipe sides. Remember? This one's okeh for me. Walk around the ship. Look out over the harbor, out over Southampton. The sign on the pier. "Thanks, Yanks! Good Luck." The band's playing *Holiday for Strings*. Not bad! Food? Good. The ship's moving. Up on deck. Southampton's back there somewhere and we're heading out to sea. Around the isle and out to sea. It's foggy now. Can't hardly see it any more. So long, England. Two and a half years, almost. So long for now. The white bluff over there with the green thatch on top. That's England. So long. Time to hit the sack.

You watched as they came on board and there were some men from the 350th. Clarence Schroepfer, the crew chief. Wayne Ketchum. Bill Shaw. And Jerry Ferroggiaro, the Major's gunner. So you're not alone!

The days pass slowly. It's good weather now. The men are all over everything. Along the hatches, along the decks, taking sun baths, reading. Meals are good. Lines are orderly. Not much like the Queen Elizabeth. More seasickness here, too. The ship has a lusty motion. Up and down, with a sort of swivel motion thrown in. Men suffering all over the place. Others get along all right. Cards, reading, walking, talking. What are you going to do? Vacation? The old job? A new job? Think you'll miss all this? Not much! Talk, talk, talk. All the way across the Atlantic. Off in the distance a grey outline of a Liberty ship plowing across the sea. That must be the Marshall Elliott. This ship's a coal-burner. That means soot. Lots of it. Everyone is filthy. Salt showers stink. Wait until we get to New York. Are we going to New York? The crew said no. The Captain says yes. Somebody else overheard we're heading for Newport News. The mate says Boston. The Colonel said he didn't know. I think New York. A person's got to go through New York! Why, that's where the Statue of Liberty is. Old Girl. That's what I'm going to say. Just like that. Hi, Old Girl. We're back. That's it. Just like that. Hi, Old Girl. I'm back. You can stop carrying that torch now. I'm back.

Jerry talks a lot about the future and much about the past. He tells incredible, exciting stories about the Major and his cronies attempting to figure out escapes. He tells about the escape attempt that cost him the tip of his finger. He tells about the two Germans he met in the forest in Germany and how they tried to escape and how he had to shoot them as they ran. He shows the pass books they carried with their service history and their photographs. You look at the picture of the young, blonde German and wonder why all this had to be. How could such a nice looking guy be such a cold heel!

Ketchum talks about what he is going to do and Shaw thinks he'll move to Los Angeles. Schroepfer isn't quite sure whether he'll follow up the art work or not.

Finally, one day, a little before noon, you go up on the forward portion of the ship where everybody else seems to be. You all strain your eyeballs trying to pierce through the haze. There it is! The Jersey coast! A thin smudge along the horizon. Then, rising unmistakably out of the sea, the American coastline! Everyone is cheering. You're impatient and wish this old scow would move!

The ship edges and zig-zags down the fishing flagged lanes. You pass a few fishing smacks out there. People, American people, homefolks, stand up and wave back at you. The ship goes on. After a while there's a bit of Long Island! The Nantucket lightship. The pilot comes out and the triumphal trip starts up New York harbor. Slow, barely creeping now, but on up into the harbor, nevertheless. It's a bright, glittering, warm sunny afternoon. That's God's country off to the sides. You've got to eat! Why does the Army always feed when there is something to see? You hear the band but



you can't see the boat that's ranging along the other side. There are men all over everything. In the rigging, in the lifeboats, on the hatches, along the rails, everywhere. The band is playing "Sentimental Journey" and there are girls waving and dancing on the decks. "Welcome Home—Well Done" that's what it says on the sides of the little boat. The people in the buildings on shore are waving now. Everyone is waving. The ships in the harbor are greeting us with three blasts. So are we. Answering them. Three blasts. Little ships, big ships, ferryboats, any kind of a ship, all of them tooting three blasts . . . all for us!

Manhattan! The whole pile of Wall Street rising white and shimmery out of the sea. The men stand and sit and crouch all over the ship, feasting their eyes. There's the Brooklyn Bridge. There's Brooklyn! Yi, Good old Brooklyn. Tree Still Growing? There's the Battery. Whatinell they doing to it? Digging it up? Race over to the other side now. There she is! Hi ya, Old Girl. You can put down that torch now. Baby's home again! Off the Battery now. Lower Broadway. Look at that, willya. They're throwing paper out of the windows. Just like we were big shots coming in. Listen to that racket! Those people away up there on the top floor, they're waving. There's the Empire State. See where that plane ran into it. Boy, that's a hole. On up the river. There's where we took off from. Remember? There's Radio City. Look at the cars along the Parkway. Everybody's waving, blowing their car horns. Boy, those cars look swell. New York looks swell. America looks swell. Awful swell!

Shuffle. Shuffle. Shuffle. Off the boat. GI trucks. It's the same camp we left from. Where's the telephone? The big meal. Steaks! Steaks! Big, juicy, oozy steaks! Call home, wire, write. Gotta hit the sack! I'm exhausted. Boy, this had been a day, brother, a day!

Kilmer's the same. Same old barracks, same old offices where the Orderly Room, where the Supply Room used to be. Seems funny to see them unchanged after all this time. The PX is the same. Everything's the same. The Service Club across the field. Even the food at the Mess Hall still stinks! Kilmer's the same.

Plane Ride. Train Ride. Bus Ride. Truck. What a hole! D'ja ever see a reception—pardon ME—separation center that wasn't? Seventy-two more hours. That's what the Major said. Oh, he's a Colonel? Who cares. He said it anyway. Seventy-two more hours. You'll be a free man! Seventy-two hours. Listen to the speakers. Wait for that roster. There it is. There's the schedule. Thirty-two, thirty-one more hours now. If things go right. Private Blow, report to the Service Club, you got visitors! Lucky guy. Two more days now. Not quite. The physical. Long lines of nudes all over again. God, suppose they find something wrong! Suppose the dentist wants to fill my teeth or something! Passed! Oh, boy! Fidget. Hot. Consultation. Do you want insurance. Sure, I don't care. Get a beer. What now? Sign the discharge paper? Sure thing. It's a pleasure. Get the discharge emblem on. Good old Ruptured Duck! What'll I wear home? Polish up. What a dump! Man it's hot in this country! Tomorrow's the day, Mom. It's hot in this booth. See you tomorrow. Hold everything! What's wrong with him. Taken off the roster? Poor devil. My heart bleeds for him. I woke up at five this morning. When's the formation? Paycall at seven? Good stuff Take everything you need. Don't leave anything. You ain't coming back, son! Paycall. Cash. Lots of it. Yow! Over to the chapel. Silence. Cool. A few well chosen words. Wonder how many times he's done this. It's another Major. He's calling names now. An organ somewhere. Playing God Bless America. The Air Corps song. Off we go into the wild blue yonder. Remember? Marching to AM school at Sheppard Field. My name! My paper. My salute. The last one. Look at them all come up like that, smiling, happy, tremulous. You lovely white sheet of paper!

Everybody's going out now. The organ's on another tune. Should old acquaintance be forgot. Should old acquaintance be forgot and never brought to mind? Could it

be forgot? By any of them coming across the sweep of the ocean. On every Queen, on every Victory, every Liberty ship that comes in every day of the week. By some of them still sweating it out all over England. Men of the 350th dribbling home now in little handfuls everytime the hour hand turns. Can you forget the memories, the two years, three years, almost four? Should old acquaintance be forgot. Could old acquaintance be forgot? Not likely.

THE END

*The following comprise the original cadre for the 350th Bombardment Squadron per orders dated 28 October 1942:*

Capt. Gale W. Clevon	Pvt. Thomas Whitmire	Cpl. Luther E. Tisdale
2d Lt. Donald J. Blazer	Pvt. Claude Bush	Sgt. Carl C. McDonough
2d Lt. Timothy R. McMahon	Pvt. Clarence J. Schroepfer	Pfc. William Tordi
2d Lt. Robert H. Tienken	Pvt. David A. Hey	Pvt. Robert W. Brindle
M/Sgt. Harry H. McMillion	Pvt. R. W. Christensen	S/Sgt. Albert Strain
Cpl. Kenneth R. Peterson	Sgt. Chandler S. Lynch	Pfc. Alvin J. Gabrick
Sgt. Louis A. Hays	Pvt. Michael F. Glowiak	Cpl. John T. Richardson
Pvt. Henry M. Fox	Pvt. Jesse F. Estes	Pfc. Arlo L. Hilberg
S/Sgt. Donald Bradley	Pvt. Frank Bouchy	Pvt. Joseph A. Krystof
Pvt. Melvin B. Cooperman	Pvt. Thomas C. Tumbove	Pvt. John A. Zinkine
Sgt. Steve S. Kane	Pvt. William C. Campbell	Pvt. Edward J. Kotwica
Cpl. Victor R. Pacek	S/Sgt. Richard D. Hawkins	Cpl. Coleman F. Sartoris
Cpl. Jay Q. Mill	Cpl. Wilbur E. Leypoldt	Pvt. Lawrence L. Axness
Sgt. John C. Riffle	S/Sgt. William H. Jackson	Cpl. David W. Jensen
Pvt. Marion F. Wilson	Cpl. John B. Cannon	Pvt. Abraham G. Fein
T/Sgt. Riley B. Dempsey	Pvt. J. J. Monmot	Pvt. A. C. Hostetler
Sgt. Lawrence Bowa	Pvt. G. A. Bowers	Pvt. Matthew Merritt, Jr.
	Cpl. Ernest E. Clarke	

NOTE: Pvt. Roger Sortevik was an original member of Hq. Detachment; the names of Horace L. Varian, Jr., and 1st Sgt. Karl W. Kirm were added by later order.



*The following comprise the loading lists for overseas movement as of May, 1943. Any man listed below was, upon arrival at overseas station, considered a member of the "original" 350th Bomb Squadron:*

#### AIR ECHELON

Major Gale W. Clevon	Pvt. John K. Beard	Pvt. Britton I. Smith
Capt. Richard A. Carey	S/Sgt. Gene F. Frank	Cpl. Jerome E. Ferroggiaro
M/Sgt. Harry H. McMillion	S/Sgt. George R. Appleton	1st Lt. Ronald W. Braley
M/Sgt. Albert S. Strain	S/Sgt. William D. Whitley	2nd Lt. Walter H. Trenchard
M/Sgt. William H. Jackson	1st Lt. Bernard A. DeMarco	2nd Lt. John E. Fawcett
T/Sgt. Lawrence Bowa	F/O James P. Thayer	1st Lt. Thomas D. Carlton
2nd Lt. Robert V. Kaiser	1st Lt. John W. Downs	T/Sgt. Joseph E. McGuire
Capt. Mark E. Carnell	2nd Lt. Francis C. Harper	S/Sgt. Charles C. Grissom
2nd Lt. Edward K. Moffly	T/Sgt. Benjamin J. Barr	T/Sgt. James R. Bair
1st Lt. Anthony C. Gospodar	Cpl. Leo T. Callahan	S/Sgt. Donald G. Ruggles
1st Lt. James P. Fitton	Cpl. Thornton Stringfellow	S/Sgt. Elmo E. White
T/Sgt. Vern M. Best	S/Sgt. Albert M. Freitas	S/Sgt. Phil W. Ong
S/Sgt. William J. Williams	S/Sgt. Harry C. Calhoun	
Sgt. Edmund A. Oliver	S/Sgt. Leon A. Castro	1st Lt. Ronald W. Hollenbeck
S/Sgt. Steve Bosser		F/O John L. Williams
S/Sgt. Paul A. Vrabec, Jr.	1st Lt. Harold B. Helstrom	2nd Lt. Harold L. Weintraub
S/Sgt. Floyd P. Bullard	F/O Hubert E. Trent	2nd Lt. Zeak M. Buckner, Jr.
1st Lt. Roy F. Claytor	2nd Lt. Harold H. Curtice	T/Sgt. Rush S. Mintz
2nd Lt. Raymond Nutting	2nd Lt. Hilbert W. Phillippe	S/Sgt. William A. Rouse
2nd Lt. Oscar Amison	T/Sgt. Robert C. Giles	T/Sgt. Emile A. Reimherr
2nd Lt. Kenneth R. Lorch	Pvt. Joseph Shandor	S/Sgt. John Q. Paciotti
T/Sgt. John W. Burgin	T/Sgt. Carroll F. Haarup	S/Sgt. Glen H. Keirse
S/Sgt. Charles K. Bailey	S/Sgt. Charles C. Sprague	S/Sgt. Thomas E. Flounders
T/Sgt. Steve Kopczewski	S/Sgt. Charles E. Crippen	1st Lt. William D. DeSanders
S/Sgt. Robert H. Wussow	S/Sgt. Thomas F. Mezynski	2nd Lt. William J. Styles
S/Sgt. Joseph E. Kehoe		2nd Lt. Calvin H. DeFevre
S/Sgt. Edward A. Musante	1st Lt. Norman H. Scott	2nd Lt. William E. Griffith
1st Lt. Charles L. Duncan	2nd Lt. Kenneth O. Blair	T/Sgt. Lester I. Berg
2nd Lt. Archibald L. Robertson	1st Lt. Donald L. Strout	S/Sgt. Charles J. Mayville
2nd Lt. Oliver M. Chiesl	1st Lt. Norris G. Norman	T/Sgt. George L. Rudden
1st Lt. William H. Forbes	T/Sgt. James E. Parks	S/Sgt. Norman C. Eddy
T/Sgt. Ernest de los Santos	S/Sgt. Paddy Blazier	Pvt. Robert D. Lepper
S/Sgt. Bernard I. Hanover	T/Sgt. Norman M. Smith	S/Sgt. Maynard T. Parsons
	S/Sgt. Lewis I. Miller	

*Other members of the unit who flew to England on crews of other Squadrons included:*

S/Sgt. Thomas A. Madel



**GROUND ECHELON**

*The following comprise the Ground Echelon, sailing from New York City, May 1943:*

1st Lt. Horace L. Varian, Jr.	Sgt. John A. Zinkine	Pvt. Nuggett B. Bernadac
2nd Lt. James E. Bowers	Cpl. Alfred F. Ackerman	Pvt. Claud E. Brady
1st Lt. Robert H. Tienken	Cpl. John T. Ballasch	Pvt. Faraon S. Chapa
2nd Lt. William H. Cook	Cpl. Charles T. Banks	Pvt. William M. Copple
1st Lt. Timothy R. McMahon	Cpl. Robert A. Bayer	Pvt. Jay P. Crowley
1st Lt. Franklin S. Seibert	Cpl. Diego Bonucchi	Sgt. James Fitch
2nd Lt. Irving Juster	Cpl. Frank Bouchy	Sgt. Ben Garber
2nd Lt. Albert Paul	Cpl. Richard E. Bowler	Sgt. Charles E. Geisinger
1st Lt. Malcolm W. Clouter	Cpl. Duffy Brooks	Sgt. Michael F. Glowiak
1st Lt. John R. Caverly	Cpl. Theodore Buchanan	Sgt. George W. Gouin
Capt. Marvin S. Bowman	Cpl. Donald G. Campbell	Sgt. Arlo L. Hilberg
1st Lt. Kenneth S. Welty	Cpl. William C. Campbell	Sgt. Lawrence J. Keehn
1st Lt. Donald J. Blazer	Cpl. John J. Chapman	Sgt. Wayne J. Ketchum
2nd Lt. Richard C. Nordrum	Cpl. Leon R. Cole	Sgt. Max Kushner
Capt. John W. Hardy	Cpl. John T. Cox	Sgt. Herbert D. Lake
1st Sgt. Karl W. Kirn	Cpl. Jasper C. Dedobbeleer	Sgt. J. B. Linduff
M/Sgt. Riley B. Dempsey	Cpl. Pasquale A. DeLeonardo	Sgt. Rudolph W. Martin
M/Sgt. Robert C. Everett	Cpl. Clayton A. Derleth	Sgt. Milton L. Martinson
M/Sgt. Steve S. Kane	Cpl. Paul H. DeWitt	Sgt. Bruno Mathien
M/Sgt. Wilbur E. Lepoldt	Cpl. Leonard J. Dombroski	Sgt. Orville J. Matthews
M/Sgt. Carl C. McDonough	Cpl. Willis M. Douglass	Sgt. Joseph R. Mattia
M/Sgt. Victor R. Pacek	Cpl. Louis M. Dragone	Sgt. Leo J. Muehr
M/Sgt. John T. Richardson, Jr.	Cpl. James M. Dunn	Sgt. William F. Muller
M/Sgt. John C. Riffle	Cpl. John E. Eggleston	Sgt. Thomas H. Nantz
T/Sgt. Donald W. Bradley	Cpl. Abraham G. Fein	Sgt. Stanley J. Napiorkowski
T/Sgt. John B. Cannon	Cpl. Elwood L. Frum	Sgt. Earl N. Neville
T/Sgt. Howard DeLeeuw	Cpl. Michael R. Gabor	Sgt. William R. Newton
T/Sgt. Henry Fox	Cpl. Alvin J. Gabrick	Sgt. James P. Nichols
T/Sgt. Richard D. Hawkins	Cpl. William Gano	Sgt. Jacob D. Nyfeler
T/Sgt. Edward J. Kotwica	Cpl. Paul S. Gazda	Sgt. James J. O'Brien
T/Sgt. Chandler S. Lynch	Cpl. Isidore I. Gootnick	Sgt. Pasquale A. Odoardi
T/Sgt. Louis Picardi	Cpl. Albert E. Hann	Sgt. Orville F. Olson
T/Sgt. Coleman F. Sartoris	Cpl. Donald E. Hermann	Sgt. Cecil C. Owenby
T/Sgt. Clarence J. Schroepfer	Cpl. Amos Hill	Sgt. Joseph F. Panczak
T/Sgt. Luther E. Tisdale	Cpl. Charles L. Holmes	Cpl. Frank N. Linderoth, Jr.
T/Sgt. Thomas C. Whitmire	Cpl. Thomas E. Horak	Cpl. James B. Lively
S/Sgt. Claude Bush	Cpl. Alban J. Kapper	Cpl. Willard F. Mabry
S/Sgt. Robert D. Champion	Cpl. John Lamartine	Cpl. Edward J. Matyasowski
S/Sgt. George Chrzanowski	Cpl. Robert Landphere	Cpl. George R. Menefee
S/Sgt. Ernest E. Clarke	Cpl. Bernard F. Leo	Cpl. Matthew Merritt, Jr.
S/Sgt. Melvin B. Cooperman	Cpl. Paul I. Strong	Cpl. Harold J. Milway
S/Sgt. Lester R. Darneille	Cpl. Milburn R. Surdez	Cpl. Hoy H. Mitchell
S/Sgt. Reginald E. Dietzel	Cpl. Graydon Tirey	Cpl. Fred T. Muschell
S/Sgt. Edward F. Dolezal	Cpl. Sylvester J. Trojanowski	Cpl. Leonard F. Muszynski
S/Sgt. Harold Garic	Cpl. John L. Van Beek	Cpl. Robert W. Myers
S/Sgt. J. C. Hale	Cpl. William H. Verser	Cpl. George W. Oldroyd
S/Sgt. David A. Hey	Cpl. Roy W. Webb	Cpl. Curtis O. Parketon
S/Sgt. A. C. Hostetler	Cpl. Thomas H. Zoeller	Cpl. Frank Perry
S/Sgt. Nicholas Karoglou	Pfc. Charles T. Alexander	Cpl. Arthur E. Piunti
S/Sgt. Joseph A. Krystof	Pfc. Otto K. Alley	Cpl. Walter J. Pluto
S/Sgt. Leonard J. Krzywicki	Pfc. Leonard F. Ball	pl. George O. Price
S/Sgt. Robert W. Lester	Pfc. Paul F. Barefield	Cpl. Paul V. Rajunas
S/Sgt. Jay Q. Mill	Pfc. Kenneth L. Beale	Cpl. Fausto (Pancho) Ramirez
S/Sgt. Glenn M. Myers	Pfc. Harold F. Beckett	Cpl. George B. Raschke
S/Sgt. Warren D. Nelson	Pfc. John Bindas	Cpl. James S. Rinaldi
S/Sgt. Kenneth R. Peterson	Pfc. Chester R. Brown	Cpl. Leslie A. Rowton
S/Sgt. David L. Presley	Pfc. Ralph S. Carmona	Cpl. Bernard R. Salmund
S/Sgt. Robert Q. Reynolds	Pfc. Joseph M. Chandler	Cpl. Thomas Scraper
S/Sgt. Donald J. Secord	Pfc. Henry F. Clayburn	Cpl. Wade B. Shaver
S/Sgt. William H. Vickers	Pfc. Joseph P. J. Davin	Cpl. William E. Shaw
S/Sgt. David C. Wiley	Pfc. Nicholas S. Dell'Aquila	Cpl. Norman E. Smith

## GROUND ECHELON

Sgt. Robert W. Brindle	Pfc. Gordys B. Diers	Cpl. Joseph S. Sobek
Sgt. Norman G. Bryant	Pfc. Wilmer L. Donahue	Cpl. Franklin E. Stifter
Sgt. Albert Budine	Pfc. Wilfred Fontenot	Pvt. Raymond Daniel
Sgt. James J. Carlton	Pfc. Angelo Frudakis	Pvt. John S. Erp
Sgt. Patrick M. Chandler	Pfc. Hyman Goldstein	Pvt. Melecio Garcia
Sgt. Arnold R. Creighton	Pfc. Leodore E. Hamelin	Pvt. Pedro L. Garza
Sgt. Lee R. Cropp	Pfc. Edward Harris	Pvt. Santiago Garza
Sgt. Roy F. Dorman	Pfc. Nick W. Harris, Jr.	Pvt. Richard L. Gouin
Sgt. Alexander Dunn	Pfc. Patrick J. Harrity	Pvt. James M. Griffith
Sgt. John D. Eltzroth	Pfc. Francis J. Hartnett	Pvt. Warren J. Harris
Sgt. Arthur Ernst	Pfc. Roger M. Hoffman	Pvt. Diego Hernandez
Sgt. Louis H. Fallmann	Pfc. Thomas R. Hughes	Pvt. Ivan R. Jackson
Sgt. Edward W. Fawcett	Pfc. Oscar N. Legg	Pvt. Walter Kane
Sgt. Robert A. Pullar, Jr.	Pfc. Roger W. Lyons	Pvt. Edward L. Kilroy
Sgt. Frank Quilici	Pfc. Earl F. McCollister	Pvt. William D. Logsdon
Sgt. Kenneth Retz	Pfc. Ambus L. Morris	Pvt. Ray A. Matz
Sgt. Jack W. Sheridan	Pfc. James O'Sullivan	Pvt. Joe McElroy
Sgt. Charles R. Smith	Pfc. Aaron E. Rozier	Pvt. Robert L. McRae
Sgt. Virgil G. Smith	Pfc. Ira E. Ryman	Pvt. George Monroe
Sgt. Alex P. Sokolosky	Pfc. Herbert A. Scheffel	Pvt. Homer L. Parker
Sgt. John C. Spence, Jr.	Pfc. Leonard Schlossberg	Pvt. Dennis Polver
Sgt. Clifford R. Starkey	Pfc. Bernard Schwartz	Pvt. Ralph W. Reed
Sgt. Ben L. Steenwyk	Pfc. Wayne A. Scott	Pvt. Lester Sanders
Sgt. Clarence A. Steubing	Pfc. Jacob Skaggs	Pvt. Howard P. Simpson
Sgt. Lewis Strohkirch	Pfc. Jack Smith	Pvt. John Thompson
Sgt. Abel A. Tiquet	Pfc. Roger L. Sortevik	Pvt. Michael J. Vespole
Sgt. Joseph A. Uhring	Pfc. George E. Thomas	Pvt. Leslie G. Wade
Sgt. Joseph M. Vassar	Pfc. Budd R. Wallize	Pvt. James B. Walden
Sgt. Leo D. Walton	Pfc. Charles H. Whalon, Jr.	Pvt. Robert L. Walker
Sgt. Jimmie Whitmire	Pfc. Marvin J. Wolfman	Pvt. Robert J. Wiese
Sgt. Aubra T. Williamson	Pfc. Henry C. Young, Jr.	Pfc. William H. Blaeuer
Sgt. John H. Young	Pvt. Antonio L. Barbosa	

NOTE: All rank listed above is the rank at time of specific orders.



## ORIGINAL SHIPS OF THE 350th SQUADRON

Flak Happy  
Alice From Dallas  
Tweedle-o-Twill  
Sweater Girl

Judy E  
Duration Plus Six  
Our Baby  
Phartzac

Lovely Girl  
Badger Beauty  
Maybe  
Asthma



## COMBAT OPERATIONAL SORTIES

## UNOFFICIAL LIST

1—25 June '43 . . . . . Bremen, Ger.	14—30 July '43 . . . . . Kassel, Ger.
2—26 June '43 . . . . . LeMans, Fr.	15—12 Aug. '43 . . . . . Bonn, Ger.
3—28 June '43 . . . . . St. Nazaire, Fr.	16—15 Aug. '43 . . . . . Merville-Lille, Fr.
4—29 June '43 . . . . . LeMans, Fr.	17—17 Aug. '43 . . . . . Regensburg, Ger.
5—4 July '43 . . . . . LaPallice, Fr.	18—19 Aug. '43 . . . . . Woensdrecht, Bel.
6—10 July '43 . . . . . LeBourget, Fr.	19—24 Aug. '43 . . . . . Evreux, Fr.
7—14 July '43 . . . . . LeBourget, Fr.	20—25 Aug. '43 . . . . . Bordeaux, Fr.
8—17 July '43 . . . . . Hamburg, Ger.	21—27 Aug. '43 . . . . . Wattan, Fr.
9—24 July '43 . . . . . Trondheim, Norway	22—31 Aug. '43 . . . . . LeMureaux, Fr.
10—25 July '43 . . . . . Waremunde, Ger.	23—3 Sept. '43 . . . . . Paris, Fr.
11—26 July '43 . . . . . Hanover, Ger.	24—6 Sept. '43 . . . . . Conches, Ger.
12—28 July '43 . . . . . Oschersleben, Ger.	25—7 Sept. '43 . . . . . Wattan, Fr.
13—29 July '43 . . . . . Waremunde, Ger.	26—9 Sept. '43 . . . . . Beauvais-Tille, Fr.

## COMBAT OPERATIONAL SORTIES (Continued)

27—15 Sept. '43	Renault, Fr.	91—27 Mar. '44	Bordeaux, Fr.
28—16 Sept. '43	LaPallice, Fr.	92—28 Mar. '44	Chateaudun, Fr.
29—23 Sept. '43	Vannes, Fr.	93—1 April '44	Ludwigshaven, Ger.
30—26 Sept. '43	Paris, Fr.	94—8 April '44	Quackenbruck, Ger.
31—27 Sept. '43	Emden, Ger.	95—10 April '44	Rheims, Fr.
32—2 Oct. '43	Emden, Ger.	96—11 April '44	Rostock, Ger.
33—4 Oct. '43	Saarlouis, Ger.	97—12 April '44	Leipzig, Ger.
34—8 Oct. '43	Bremen, Ger.	98—13 April '44	Augsburg, Ger.
35—9 Oct. '43	Marienburg, Ger.	99—18 April '44	Berlin, Ger.
36—10 Oct. '43	Munster, Ger.	100—19 April '44	Werl & Lippstadt, Ger.
37—14 Oct. '43	Schweinfurt, Ger.	101—20 April '44	"No-Ball"
38—18 Oct. '43	Duren, Ger.	102—22 April '44	Hamm, Ger.
39—20 Oct. '43	Duren, Ger.	103—24 April '44	Friedrichshafen, Ger.
40—3 Nov. '43	Wilhemshaven, Ger.	104—25 April '44	Dijon, Fr.
41—5 Nov. '43	Gelsenkerchen, Ger.	105—26 April '44	Brunswick, Ger.
42—7 Nov. '43	Duren, Ger.	106—27 April '44	"No-Ball"
43—13 Nov. '43	Bremen, Ger.	107—27 April '44	LeCulot, Fr.
44—16 Nov. '43	Rjukan, Norway	108—28 April '44	Sottevast, Fr.
45—19 Nov. '43	Belsenkerchen, Ger.	109—29 April '44	Berlin, Ger.
46—26 Nov. '43	Bremen, Ger.	110—1 May '44	Saaregvemines, Fr.
47—29 Nov. '43	Bremen, Ger.	111—1 May '44	Crossbow
48—30 Nov. '43	Solingen, Ger.	112—7 May '44	Berlin, Ger.
49—5 Dec. '43	Bordeaux, Fr.	113—8 May '44	Berlin, Ger.
50—11 Dec. '43	Emden, Ger.	114—8 May '44	LaGlacerie, Fr.
51—13 Dec. '43	Kiel, Ger.	115—9 May '44	Couvrom (A)
52—16 Dec. '43	Bremen, Ger.		Athies (B), Fr.
53—20 Dec. '43	Bremen, Ger.	116—11 May '44	Liege, Belgium
54—22 Dec. '43	Munster, Ger.	117—12 May '44	Brux, Czechoslovakia
55—24 Dec. '43	"No-Ball"	118—13 May '44	Osnabruck, Ger.
56—30 Dec. '43	Ludwigshaven, Ger.	119—19 May '44	Berlin, Ger.
57—31 Dec. '43	Paris, Fr.	120—20 May '44	Brussels, Bel.
58—4 Jan. '44	Kiel, Ger.	121—23 May '44	Troyes, Fr.
59—5 Jan. '44	Nuess, Ger.	122—24 May '44	Berlin, Ger.
60—7 Jan. '44	Ludwigshaven, Ger.	123—25 May '44	Brussels, Bel.
61—11 Jan. '44	Osnabruck, Ger.	124—27 May '44	Strasbourg, Fr.
62—14 Jan. '44	Crossbow	125—28 May '44	Magdeburg, Ger.
63—21 Jan. '44	Crossbow	126—29 May '44	Leipzig, Ger.
64—24 Jan. '44	Frankfurt, Ger.	127—30 May '44	Troyes, Fr.
65—29 Jan. '44	Frankfurt, Ger.	128—31 May '44	Osnabruck, Ger.
66—30 Jan. '44	Brunswick, Ger.	129—2 June '44	Secret, Fr.
67—3 Feb. '44	Wilhemshaven, Ger.	130—2 June '44	Paris, Fr.
68—4 Feb. '44	Frankfurt, Ger.	131—4 June '44	Boulogne, Fr.
69—5 Feb. '44	Villa Coublay, Fr.	132—5 June '44	Abbeville, Fr.
70—6 Feb. '44	Evreux, Fr.	133—6 June '44	Coast of France
71—10 Feb. '44	Brunswick, Ger.	134—6 June '44	Coast of France
72—13 Feb. '44	Crossbow	135—6 June '44	Coast of France
73—20 Feb. '44	Arnimswalde, Ger.	136—7 June '44	Nantes, Fr.
74—21 Feb. '44	Brunswick, Ger.	137—8 June '44	Tours, Fr.
75—24 Feb. '44	Rostock, Ger.	138—11 June '44	Berck-sur-Mer, Fr.
76—25 Feb. '44	Regensburg, Ger.	139—12 June '44	Coast of France
77—28 Feb. '44	Crossbow	140—14 June '44	LeCulot, Fr.
78—29 Feb. '44	Brunswick, Ger.	141—15 June '44	Wilster, Ger.
79—2 Mar. '44	Chartres, Fr.	142—18 June '44	Brunsbüttelkoog, Ger.
80—3 Mar. '44	Berlin, Ger.	143—19 June '44	Ecluse, Fr.
81—4 Mar. '44	Berlin, Ger.	144—20 June '44	Fallersleden, Fr.
82—6 Mar. '44	Berlin, Ger.	145—21 June '44	Berlin, Ger.
83—8 Mar. '44	Berlin, Ger.	146—21 June '44*	Ruhland, Ger.
84—9 Mar. '44	Berlin, Ger.	147—22 June '44	Paris, Fr.
85—15 Mar. '44	Brunswick, Ger.	148—24 June '44	Rouen, Fr.
86—16 Mar. '44	Augsburg, Ger.	149—25 June '44	Southern France
87—18 Mar. '44	Munich, Ger.	150—26 June '44*	Drohobycz, Poland
88—19 Mar. '44	"No-Ball"	151—29 June '44	Bohlen, Ger.
89—22 Mar. '44	Berlin, Ger.	152—3 July '44*	Arad, Rumania
90—23 Mar. '44	Brunswick, Ger.	153—4 July '44	Gien, Fr.



## COMBAT OPERATIONAL SORTIES (Continued)

154—5 July '44*	Beziere, Fr.	215—18 Oct. '44	Kassel, Ger.
155—6 July '44	"No-Ball"	216—19 Oct. '44	Ludwigshaven, Ger.
156—7 July '44	Gottlingen, Ger.	217—22 Oct. '44	Munster, Ger.
157—8 July '44	LeLantie, Fr.	218—26 Oct. '44	Hanover, Ger.
158—11 July '44	Munich, Ger.	219—30 Oct. '44	Western Ger.
159—12 July '44	Munich, Ger.	220—2 Nov. '44	Merseburg, Ger.
*Indicates Shuttle Mission.			
160—13 July '44	Munich, Ger.	221—5 Nov. '44	Ludwigshaven, Ger.
161—14 July '44	Southern France	222—6 Nov. '44	Neumunster, Ger.
162—17 July '44	Auxerre, Fr.	223—9 Nov. '44	Saarbrucken, Ger.
163—17 July '44	"No-Ball"	224—10 Nov. '44	Mainz, Ger.
164—18 July '44	Kiel, Ger.	225—16 Nov. '44	Langerehe, Ger.
165—19 July '44	Schweinfurt, Ger.	226—21 Nov. '44	Osnabruck, Ger.
166—20 July '44	Merseburg, Ger.	227—26 Nov. '44	Hamm, Ger.
167—21 July '44	Ludwigshaven, Ger.	228—29 Nov. '44	Hamm, Ger.
168—24 July '44	St. Lo, Fr.	229—30 Nov. '44	Merseburg, Ger.
169—25 July '44	St. Lo, Fr.	230—2 Dec. '44	Coblenz, Ger.
170—28 July '44	Merseburg, Ger.	231—4 Dec. '44	Frieburg, Ger.
171—29 July '44	Merseburg, Ger.	232—5 Dec. '44	Berlin, Ger.
172—31 July '44	Munich, Ger.	233—11 Dec. '44	Giessen, Ger.
173—2 Aug. '44	LeFere, Fr.	234—12 Dec. '44	Darmstadt, Ger.
174—3 Aug. '44	Troyes, Fr.	235—18 Dec. '44	Mainz, Ger.
175—4 Aug. '44	Hamburg, Ger.	236—24 Dec. '44	Biblis & Babenhausen, Ger.
176—5 Aug. '44	Magdeburg, Ger.	237—25 Dec. '44	Kaiserlautern, Ger.
177—6 Aug. '44	Berlin, Ger.	238—27 Dec. '44	Fulda, Ger.
178—7 Aug. '44	Northern France	239—28 Dec. '44	Coblenz, Ger.
179—8 Aug. '44	St. Silvain, Fr.	240—29 Dec. '44	Frankfurt, Ger.
180—11 Aug. '44	Villa Coublay, Fr.	241—30 Dec. '44	Kassel, Ger.
181—13 Aug. '44	Battle Front, Fr.	242—31 Dec. '44	Hamburg, Ger.
182—14 Aug. '44	Ludwigshaven, Ger.	243—2 Jan. '45	Bad Kreuznach, Ger.
183—15 Aug. '44	Venlo, Holland	244—3 Jan. '45	Fulda, Ger.
184—18 Aug. '44	Pacy-Sur-Armancon, Fr.	245—5 Jan. '45	Frankfurt, Ger.
185—24 Aug. '44	Ruhland, Ger.	246—6 Jan. '45	Annweiler, Ger.
186—25 Aug. '44	Politz, Ger.	247—7 Jan. '45	Cologne, Ger.
187—26 Aug. '44	Brest, Fr.	248—10 Jan. '45	Duisburg, Ger.
188—27 Aug. '44	Berlin, Ger.	249—13 Jan. '45	Mainz, Ger.
189—30 Aug. '44	Bremen, Ger.	250—14 Jan. '45	Derben, Ger.
190—1 Sept. '44	Mainz, Ger.	251—17 Jan. '45	Hamburg, Ger.
191—3 Sept. '44	Crozon, Fr.	252—20 Jan. '45	Heilbronn, Ger.
192—5 Sept. '44	Stuttgart, Ger.	253—21 Jan. '45	Mannheim, Ger.
193—8 Sept. '44	Mainz, Ger.	254—28 Jan. '45	Duisburg, Ger.
194—9 Sept. '44	Dusseldorf, Ger.	255—29 Jan. '45	Kassel, Ger.
195—10 Sept. '44	Nurnberg, Ger.	256—3 Feb. '45	Berlin, Ger.
196—11 Sept. '44	Ruhland, Ger.	257—6 Feb. '45	Chemnitz, Ger.
197—12 Sept. '44	Magdeburg, (A) Fulda (B), Ger.	258—9 Feb. '45	Weimar, Ger.
198—13 Sept. '44	Sindelfinger, Ger.	259—14 Feb. '45	Chemnitz, Ger.
199—18 Sept. '44*	Warsaw, Poland	260—15 Feb. '45	Cottbus, Ger.
200—19 Sept. '44*	Szolnok, Hungary	261—17 Feb. '45	Frankfurt, Ger.
*Indicates Shuttle Mission.			
201—25 Sept. '44	Ludwigshaven, Ger.	262—19 Feb. '45	Osnabruck, Ger.
202—26 Sept. '44	Bremen, Ger.	263—20 Feb. '45	Nurnberg, Ger.
203—27 Sept. '44	Mainz, Ger.	264—21 Feb. '45	Nurnberg, Ger.
204—28 Sept. '44	Merseburg, Ger.	265—22 Feb. '45	Western Germany
205—30 Sept. '44	Bielefeld, Ger.	266—23 Feb. '45	Treuchtlingon, Ger.
206—2 Oct. '44	Kassel, Ger.	267—24 Feb. '45	Bremen, Ger.
207—3 Oct. '44	Nurnberg, Ger.	268—25 Feb. '45	Munich, Ger.
208—5 Oct. '44	Handorff, Ger.	269—26 Feb. '45	Berlin, Ger.
209—6 Oct. '44	Berlin, Ger.	270—28 Feb. '45	Kassel, Ger.
210—7 Oct. '44	Bohlen, Ger.	271—2 Mar. '45	Dresden, Ger.
211—9 Oct. '44	Mainz, Ger.	272—3 Mar. '45	Brunswick, Ger.
212—12 Oct. '44	Bremen, Ger.	273—4 Mar. '45	Ulm, Ger.
213—15 Oct. '44	Cologne, Ger.	274—7 Mar. '45	Siegen, Ger.
214—17 Oct. '44	Cologne, Ger.	275—8 Mar. '45	Langendreer, Ger.
		276—9 Mar. '45	Frankfurt, Ger.
		277—10 Mar. '45	Dortmund, Ger.

**COMBAT OPERATIONAL SORTIES (Continued)**

278—11 Mar. '45 . . . .	Hamburg, Ger.	293— 3 April '45 . . . .	Kiel, Ger.
279—12 Mar. '45 . . . .	Swinemunde, Ger.	294— 4 April '45 . . . .	Kiel, Ger.
280—14 Mar. '45 . . . .	Hanover, Ger.	295— 5 April '45 . . . .	Nurnberg, Ger.
281—15 Mar. '45 . . . .	Cranienberg, Ger.	296— 6 April '45 . . . .	Leipzig, Ger.
282—17 Mar. '45 . . . .	Plauen, Ger.	297— 7 April '45 . . . .	Buchen, Ger.
283—18 Mar. '45 . . . .	Berlin, Ger.	298— 8 April '45 . . . .	Eger, Czechoslovakia
284—19 Mar. '45 . . . .	Jena, Ger.	299— 9 April '45 . . . .	Munich, Ger.
285—21 Mar. '45 . . . .	Plauen, Ger.	300—10 April '45 . . . .	Burg, Ger.
286—22 Mar. '45 . . . .	Ahlhorn, Ger.	301—11 April '45 . . . .	Landshut, Ger.
287—23 Mar. '45 . . . .	Unna, Ger.	302—14 April '45 . . . .	Royan, Fr.
288—24 Mar. '45 . . . .	Steenwijk, Holland (A.M.)	303—15 April '45 . . . .	Royan, Fr.
289—24 Mar. '45 . . . .	Ziegenhain, Ger. (P.M.)	304—16 April '45 . . . .	Point DeGrave, Fr.
290—28 Mar. '45 . . . .	Hanover, Ger.	305—17 April '45 . . . .	Aussig, Czech.
291—30 Mar. '45 . . . .	Hamburg, Ger.	306—18 April '45 . . . .	Straubing, Czech.
292—31 Mar. '45 . . . .	Bad Burka, Zietz, Ger.	307—20 April '45 . . . .	Berlin, Ger.

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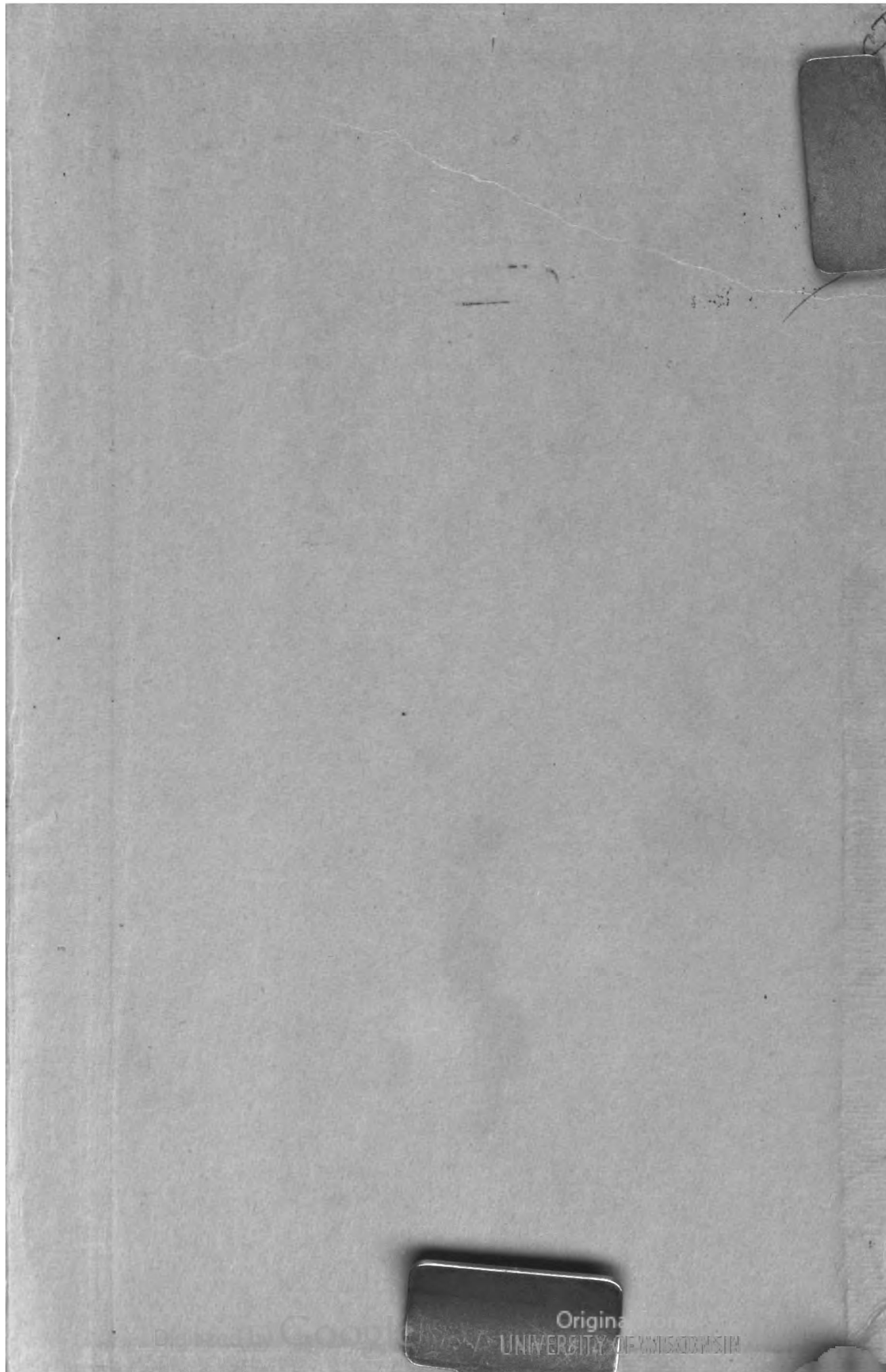




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